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Peleg Smith.

216



PELEG SMITH;

OR,

ADVENTURES IN THE TROPICS.

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PELEG SMITH.

CHAPTER I.

THE ADVENTURERS.

Three men were seated in a canoe, which was gliding slowly along under the northern bank of the Orinoco. The first personage was John Martin, a pursy, jovial, good-natured Englishman, who, being a bachelor, possessing considerable wealth, had passed the last fifteen years of his life in traveling over the world. He was one of those mild-tempered, credulous fellows, who was forever getting into trouble, and getting out again without any ill result to himself. He had journeyed over the most part of the Continent and of Asia, and had started to discover the source of the Nile, so as to head off Speke and Grant, who undertook their expedition about the same time. He averred he would have solved that problem (which has puzzled the world for centuries, and which, in the opinion of many, has not been settled as yet by any means), if he hadn't got lost in the "*'orrid country,*" and found that it taxed him to the utmost to make

his way back into civilization again. In his travels he had frequently visited the most pestilential districts, and exposed himself to the malignant diseases; and yet, strange to say, he had never experienced a day's sickness, and never lost that extraordinary appetite which seemed never satiated. We occasionally encounter such individuals, who are invulnerable against disease, and although they may be said to be slaves to their own enjoyment, yet, in defiance of the laws of nature, bid fair to live to a patriarchal old age, and then to die of natural decay. John Martin was such a man. He had seen about forty years of placid, earthly enjoyment, that left him with an imperturbable temper, a shiny, rubicund face, a plump appearance generally that abundantly qualified him to answer as the typical representative of John Bull.

Finally, before setting down in "Hold Hengland," he concluded he must "do" South America. Accordingly, he made his way, in a leisurely manner, to the West Indies, smoking, sleeping, and reading most of the way. Upon reaching Havana, he took a couple of weeks to "repose his wearied frame," as he expressed it—said repose consisting of smoking and lounging around Havana, and casting sly glances at the beautiful señoritas that frequent the promenades of that fair city—for if John Martin was an inveterate old bachelor, he was no less a great admirer of the opposite sex; which admiration had caused him the major part of his sorrow and trouble in his varied travels.

Embarking at Havana, he reached in due time one of the northern seaports of South America, where he spent a week in "reposing his weary frame" again,

and then began casting about him for some means of penetrating the interior of the continent.

One day Martin wandered down along the wharf, where his attention was attracted by a lank personage, who seemed disgusted with everything around him. A glance showed him to be one of those wanderers such as no country but New England can produce. He had a "frock coat," with very long waist and short skirts—closely resembling the present fashionable cut, although at the period to which we refer the very opposite of fashion. His pantaloons were black, large and flappy; his hat, a tall beaver; his watch, a monstrous bull's eye, with a chain that would have sufficed to secure a young bull. Both hands were thrust deep into his pockets, one of which held the end of a small rope, which led a small rat-terrier dog around with him.

The dog and his master stood surveying a number of laborers, as if they pitied, while they were disgusted with their fate from the bottom of their hearts. Three separate times Peleg Smith had essayed to open a conversation with some passers-by, but each one had hurried on, muttering something, and shaking his head, to signify that he didn't speak English, and if he did, it wasn't likely he would stop to speak it to such a specimen as himself. And this was what disgusted the man so much. He was quite anxious to sell or trade his dog, and those around him did not seem disposed to parley in regard to the matter.

Peleg Smith contemplated the laborers for a few moments, and then hearing a foot-fall, turned and encountered the rubicund, moon-like face of John Martin. His own countenance lit up with pleasure, for he read the man at a glance.

"How d'ye do? How d'ye do? Did you ever see such an all-fired country? Just hear them monkeys out there jabber! There ain't one of 'em can talk like a decent man. Don't you want to buy a dog?"

"I've got about a hundred and thirty dogs in different parts of the world, that I've bought and never took away with me. What is your cur good for?"

"He ain't a *cur*, he's a *dog*, and he's death on rats. I got him of Deacon Smith, up in Connecticut, and if you want any recommendation regarding his character, just go up and ask *him*."

"I'll take great pleasure in doing so, as I intend to make a tour of the United States, and write a book about the Americans when I go home, just as my friend Charley Dickens did, only I won't be so mean and spiteful as he was about it. Just give me the address of your friend, Deacon Smith."

Martin took out his ponderous note-book and pencil, ready to transcribe the requested information.

"Deacon Josiah Smith, 79 Pineapple-street, New Haven, Connecticut."

"Just so," said Martin, as his fat, chubby fingers twiddled over the face of the note-book. "Now what do you ask for your animal?"

"Ten dollars, and it's cheap at that. I'd ask twenty-five if I didn't want to spite them jabbering frogs there, that hain't got sense to appreciate a genuine dog."

"You say ten dollars; do you use the Federal currency?"

"That's the only genuine currency there is in the world, and that is the only kind I use."

"I think the Henglish system is the only true one."

Howsumever, we won't quarrel about that. Your price is about two sovereigns in our country," said Martin, handing the yellow pieces to his new-made acquaintance.

The good-natured Englishman took hold of the rope much in the same manner as the man who drew the elephant in the lottery may be supposed to have acted with his prize.

"I wonder whether one of those men wouldn't keep the dog for me if I should pay him well for it."

"Keep him! why keep him yourself, man! He won't cost you anything; and you will find him a first-rate companion in your travels. You might be a traveler now, I s'pose?"

"Yes; that's the reason I am in this country. I wish to see something of South American scenery before I settle down and marry."

"Ain't married, then?"

"No."

"Widower?"

"No; a bachelor, I s'pose."

"Du tell; I ain't married myself, and what's more, I don't intend to be for some time. You hain't been crossed in love, I s'pose, now?"

"No; I love all the female creation alike."

"That's a good 'eal like myself. You're a traveler, be you?"

"Yes, I suppose I am."

"Wal, I've done sumthin' of that myself in my day. I've lit my segar on the top of Stromboli and Vesuvius, and offered to shake hands with the Pope of Rome, but he put on airs, and wouldn't notice me. What part of the country are you aiming for?"

"I shall go into the interior, I think—up the Orin-

oco most probably—as soon as I can get a good guide to accompany me.”

“I s’pose now you would pay a purty good prico for a good guide, per’aps?”

“I always have to do so.”

“How’d you like *me* for a *guide*?”

“You! Do you understand this country?” asked the Englishman, in unfeigned astonishment.

“Can’t say that I deu, being this is the second day I’ve spent in South America, but then I could allers turn my hand to sumthin’, and it’s kinder natural fur me to guide. I’ve no doubt we could git along purty well together. The only trouble is, I hate England like pizen, and think the United States is the greatest country in all creation. I s’pose you hate ’em, ’cause we’ve thrashed you so all-firedly; but we’ll agree not to say nothin’ on these subjects, and then we’ll get along well enough together.”

The sturdy old John Bull began to like this erratic specimen of an American, and determined to make him a companion in his travels, if he could secure his consent.

“See here, my friend, what is your name?”

“Peleg Smith, sir, of Connecticut.”

“Well, Smith, I like you, and as I expect to spend several months in South America, I should like to enter into partnership with you.”

“I’m willing—there’s the extent of my capital,” said the New Englander, drawing out the two sovereigns which he had just received from the Englishman. “I swow, I hadn’t three cents to my name till I sold you the dog.”

“Never mind about that, my friend. I am on the track of a guide, and think I shall secure him. You

go along with me, and I will see that you have the same comforts and conveniences that I have."

"Give us your hand on that. What diamond or gold mines we discover, we go halves on, don't we?"

"Of course. Will you go home to my hotel?"

"Blazes! do you own a hotel?"

"No; I don't mean that. Will you go to the hotel where I am staying?"

"I thank you; I owe 'em here for a night's lodging and breakfast, so I guess I'll owe 'em for a little more. You can call around in the morning, and you'll find me sitting on the piazza. I like it there, 'cause there's a good place to put up my feet, and smoke my cigar."

"I'll be around in the morning, and let you know what success I have."

Mr. Martin started to move away, but his newly-acquired dog manifested a strong reluctance to accompany him. He braced back with all his legs, so that he slid over the ground like a wooden dog. Martin endeavored to coax him, but without avail. His heart was bound up in his former master, and he would not leave him unless compelled to do so by brute force.

"What'll you charge to take him off my hands?" asked our English friend in despair.

"Being it is you, I will not charge anything. I will keep him till we start on our journey, when we'll take him with us."

The two separated, Peleg Smith taking the exuberant canine away with him, while the jovial John Martin leisurely wended his way up street, pulling his segar, and congratulating himself upon the companion he had secured for his South American travels.

CHAPTER II.

NO, FOR THE ORINOCO.

About nine o'clock, on the next morning, John Martin issued from "his hotel," with a cigar in his mouth, and turned his steps toward the wharf, where he and Peleg Smith had separated. He reached it in due time, and casting about for his friend, he discovered him seated upon the front porch of a hotel, his feet higher than his head, a cigar in his mouth, and his dog, "Pugg," seated beside him, as if to guard against all intruders.

The two saluted each other good-naturedly as they came together, and Smith was the first one to break the silence.

"I don't s'pose you hardly found your guide, now?"

"Yes—found him last night, and we're to start this very day."

"Du tell! That's good. What course have you decided on?"

"We go directly South till we reach the Orinoco, up which we're to make our way in a good-sized open boat, just as far as we may seem inclined."

"And how are we to get to the Orinoco? Walk?"

"Oh! no, there are horses provided."

"Du tell; that's lucky. It's pretty well along in

the forenoon, so I s'pose we might as well wait till after dinner."

"I've no objection; but it is understood that we start then—that is if you are willing."

Peleg Smith was pleased to signify that he was willing, and as the hour of departure was agreed upon, John Martin made his way back through the broad street, to his headquarters, where his horses were awaiting him. He had provided five fine animals—three for his friend, himself, and the guide, or Llanero, and the remaining two to serve the purpose of pack-horses, or to carry his own luggage, which was about all there was of that article to carry, as Peleg Smith was in the habit of stowing all of his worldly possessions into an ordinary-sized carpet-bag.

The Llanero, a short, iron-limbed, sun-embrowned, taciturn fellow, was prompt to his appointment, and almost simultaneous with his approach was the appearance of Peleg Smith, carpet-bag in hand, with his dog Pugg trotting contentedly beside him.

"I sweow, but your ready 'bout as soon as myself. It reminds of old Deacon Jones when he buried his fourth wife. The hour was sot at two o'clock, and for fear the people would be a little late, the deacon set his two little gals running round, one to the undertaker's, to tell him the people was waiting, and the other to the people to tell 'em the undertaker was waiting. Whoa, now! none o' yer tricks 'round me!" added Peleg Smith, smartly slapping one of the animals upon his haunches. Then vaulting into the saddle, he compelled the horse to go rapidly through several gyrations—to rear upon his hind legs, to canter, gallop, and perform as varied evolutions as might

have been expected had he been under the special training of Smith himself. He discovered the fact that he was a consummate horseman, and a possessor of that peculiar characteristic of his people, of making himself at home in any country and situation.

The sun had not passed an hour beyond the meridian, when the little party moved out from the city, and took a due southern direction through Venezuela towards the famed Orinoco River. The guide, as we have already said, was what is termed in South America a Llanero—a class, of a sort of mongrel breed, who still claim descent from the old Castilian race, once the haughty rulers of the land. The Llaneros seem especially adapted for the life which they lead from childhood. As it has been said, “Cast upon a wild and apparently interminable plain, the domain of savage beasts and poisonous reptiles, their lot has been to pass all their life in a perpetual struggle, not only with the primitive possessors of the land, but with the elements themselves, often as fierce as they are grand. When it is not the alarm of the dreaded viper or the spotted jaguar, it is the sudden inroad of vast inundations, which, spreading with fearful rapidity over the land, sweep off in one moment their frail habitations, and their herds. Yet, this insecure existence, this continual struggle between life and death, between rude intellect and matter, has for the Llanero a sort of fascination, perhaps not so well understood by people possessing the blessings and ideas of civilization, but without which he could not exist, especially if deprived of his horse, and cast among the mountain region north of his cherished plains.”

The guide answered to the name of Jose. What his other appellation was—if he really possessed any

— never became known to our friends. He was attired in a rude, half-civilized dress, and was armed solely with the *trabuco*, or blunderbuss (which may be said to be the national weapon of the Venezuelians), and a sharp two-edged sword, carried at his side, and properly a compromise between a true sword and a bowie knife.

Martin had provided himself with a couple of fine Swiss rifles, that had journeyed over most of the world with him, in addition to three admirable revolvers. One of the latter, and one of the former, he had presented to Peleg Smith, who would have ventured into these wilds with no other weapons, except those with which nature had furnished him.

As our narrative has principally to do with the adventures and doings of these three characters, after their arrival in the vicinity of the Orinoco, we are compelled to pass over, as briefly as possible, the particulars of their journey thither. This journey occupied them the major part of two weeks, and every one of the little party came far closer to death than they had ever before done. But at the close of a fine summer day they reached the cot of an acquaintance of their guide, Jose, which stood within half a mile of the river. Here they remained over night, and engaged quarters for their horses.

Jose and Martin had secured the rental of a fine canoe that lay moored under the banks of the river. In the morning they rode down to the stream, with such articles and luggage as the Englishman deemed indispensable, and leaving their horses in charge of their friends, they embarked. Two hours later three men were seated in a long sort of canoe which was gliding slowly along under the northern bank of the

Orinoco, which brings us to the point at which we opened our story.

"This will do," muttered the guide, using the English tongue out of compliment to his visitors.

"Are there plenty of fish here?" inquired Martin.

"There are plenty of fish *everywhere* in Venezuela, but the spot is shady, and will suit you."

"That is true, and now if you want to see the fish hauled in, hand over hand, just watch me," said Peleg Smith, enthusiastically, as he took a line and tackle from his friend, and they both made preparations to begin the sport; but neither of the two noted a grim half-smile upon the face of their guide, as he ceased rowing, and watched their motions.

"Don't you wish to fish?" asked Martin, blandly. "I have other lines, and can lend you one."

"No; I will watch you."

"Poor feller; don't know how," said Smith, pityingly. "Jose, just watch me and learn."

Martin and Smith cast over their lines at the same moment. Each was provided with a half-dozen hooks, which were baited in the most approved manner. As these sank below the surface, each settled back with a look of complaisance, confident of reaping a bountiful harvest in this river, which probably has no superior in the world, as regards the quantity of animal life it contains.

"Now, Jose, keep yer eyes on my line, if you want to enjoy a feast. Just set near the bow of the boat, so that I won't be apt to fling the fish in your lap."

The guide obediently slid back so far that he came near shoving himself into the water, and both Smith and Martin braced themselves so as not to be taken at fault when the proper moment should come.

Strange to tell, not either of the lines was agitated, although both anglers waited for full three quarters of an hour, and although it was certain the river was literally "swimming" with fish.

The good-natured Englishman sat as patiently as a statue, hardly once removing his eyes from his line, except to watch for a moment the antics of Pugg, which occasionally became irrepressible, notwithstanding the admonitions of his former master. Peleg Smith after the lapse of ten minutes or thereabouts, muttered:

"Confound it!" and shortly afterwards he added: "It beats all natur!" and when the three-fourths-of-an-hour had nearly elapsed, he burst out: "Blast-natia, what does it all mean? Jose, what in thunder are you laughing at?"

"What occasion, Jose, is there for this mirth? It strikes me as most unseemly," added Martin, gravely.

"He! he! he! look at bait."

The words were scarce out of his mouth when both our friends jerked their lines from the water. In fact, they brought forth nothing but the lines, as the sinkers and every hook were gone!

"What has been playing the mischief with our bait?" asked the Englishman, in amazement.

"Whe-ew!" whistled the New Englander, as he scrutinized the remaining portion of his line; "that's a *little* ahead o' the time when I went a-fishing in the Guyhoga Creek in Connecticut. I baited with a bull-frog, and I'll be hanged if the bottle-eyed imp didn't crawl right out of the water, and sit on a log, for two hours grinning at me. I got so tired of seeing him at last that I flung a stick at him, and then found out for

the first time that he was my own bait. Jose, what are you laughing at? What has done this?"

"He, he, he! *Caribe* bite him off!"

"*Caribe*! What kind of an animal is that?"

"See dat?" said Jones, holding up his left hand, thereby showing that it was minus its little finger. "*Caribe* bite him off!"

The guide thereupon proceeded to explain that the *Caribe* is a small fish that infests the waters of the northern part of South America, and is one of the most voracious little monsters that ever was given the breath of life. Although but a few inches in length, these creatures seem capable of destroying almost anything with which it is possible for them to come in contact. When a boy, Jose had attempted to catch one in his hand, and emphatically "caught a Tartar," for he lost one of his fingers by the rash experiment. Wo to the reckless bather who ventures in their midst. If he do not speedily effect his escape, there is no escape for him.

"If this ain't the derndest country I ever tramped in!" exclaimed Peleg Smith. "Just think of the dangers we have come through to git here, and now I don't s'pose we've seen half the danger—eh, Jose?"

"Dat so."

"It's a 'orrid country! I've fished in the Nile with them hooks without having 'em hurt, and now they're gone!"

"I was thinking—— ough! what under heavens is that?"

A nasty, wriggling sort of snake came writhing down through the branches, falling upon Smith's hat, and then dropping down in the middle of the boat, where it gathered itself up, as if to make ready to

strike. The dog uttered a sharp yelp, and sprang toward it, but ere he could reach it Jose crushed it with the oar.

"Is that critter poisonous?" asked Smith, as the guide flung it overboard.

"Him bite, sure kill. Look up."

The adventurers did, and descried nearly a dozen of the horrid reptiles writhing in the branches overhead. Martin instantly commanded the guide to row out into the stream, so as to get out of their reach.

"While we're about it, I think you may as well row ashore, and we'll go up to the house and get dinner—that is, if Mr. Smith has no objection."

"No, I'm quite anxious; as I noticed Jose's friend has a very handsome female friend in the house, and I've a hankering to make her acquaintance."

Accordingly the guide turned the bow of the boat toward shore.

CHAPTER III.

A SINGULAR CONTEST.

The canoe had passed one half the intervening distance, when Jose's face suddenly blanched, and he muttered something in an excited manner, as he backed water, and sent the frail vessel back into the middle of the stream.

"What's up? You got a cramp?" asked Smith.

"Holy Maria! we came near death."

"Whereabout might he be?" asked Martin, taking the cigar from his mouth, and looking composedly around him.

"On the shore."

"I see nothing of him, Jose; you must be mistaken."

"Perhaps, neow, it was the echoes of my voice he heard?" said Smith, "I'm well aware it has a terrible sound; but you can get used to it. I was treed one time by a whole pack of wolves—I'd never have got away, if I hadn't gone to singing, and scart 'em all."

"It might be a good idea, my friend, to frighten away the grim fellow by the same means."

This frivolity was all lost upon Jose, the guide. Having withdrawn to a safe distance, he now gazed toward the shore as if fascinated by some strange animal. All at once, he aspirated:

"Look!"

The two gazed, but saw nothing unusual. The excessive fright of this man, who had spent his life among the wilds of South America, must certainly have some foundation. Still the mystery was what it could possibly be, and still remain invisible to their eyes, at least.

That particular portion where they had purposed to land, consisted of thick heavy mud, over which, with a little care, they might walk without soiling their feet; but which, if careless, they would probably sink to a considerable depth. Here the two adventurers did not deem it worthy to look.

They directed their vision to the plain beyond, and to the wood that fringed it. Martin, finally, became impatient:

"We have looked and looked, as you requested, Jose, but see nothing. Are there any wild animals in the wood, or"—

"Not the wood—nothing there."

"Where then can it be?"

"Look *in the mud!*"

For the first time they critically examined the shore. As Smith did so, he either saw, or fancied he detected, a movement of its surface, as though agitated by something underneath.

"What can it mean? Do you notice how the mud moves?" queried he of his companion.

"I do, now that you have called my attention to it. It can't be there's a volcano about to burst up and overwhelm us?"

"More likely an alligator," replied Smith. "We might have landed right square on his back. He must be purty good-sized, Jose."

"He ain't an alligator."

"He ain't! What can he be then?"

"Wait and you will see. Look!"

Several hundred yards away, a huge buffalo bull was seen leisurely approaching, as if to drink. Jose instantly ran the canoe under the opposite bank, where they could observe the drama without interrupting it.

The bull, when a few rods from the shore, raised his head and sniffed the air, as if he scented danger, but continued to advance, apparently satisfied that nothing menaced him.

In the meantime the eyes of both Martin and Smith became fixed upon that portion of the mud which first attracted attention. When fixedly viewed, it could be seen to rise and sink in gentle, but regular respirations, proving that some huge animal lay beneath it, waiting and watching for its prey.

Onward came the bull, step by step, his eyes now fixed upon the water which had drawn him thither. Suddenly the mud was seen to fly upward, as if a shell had burst beneath, an immense body of prodigious length shot outward, like the arm of a human being in the act of striking a blow, and a bellow of pain and terror proved that the bull had suddenly become sensible of the attempt upon his life.

With such amazing suddenness did everything occur, that it was a moment before our friends realized what had really taken place. They then saw that an immense serpent of the constrictor species had been concealed in the mud, waiting for some prey to come into its maws.

The bull chancing to be the first, it had struck its

teeth into the tough cartilaginous nose, where they were now immovably fixed.

As quick as lightning the old bull realized the frightful peril that had burst upon him. The tail of the serpent was buried in the mud, where it would require all the powers of earth to dislodge it. In fact, as Smith afterwards expressed it, if Hencke's comet had been hitched to the head of the serpent, it could not have budged the stern.

On the other hand, the bull seemed actuated by the same stubborn determination. The object of the snake was to draw his prey to him; and the object of the latter was not to let him do it, and nobly did he exert himself.

Planting his feet firmly in the ground, he at first contented himself with merely resisting the strength of his enemy. The latter pulled with a power that was incredible.

The feet of the buffalo sank into the yielding mud, but his limbs did not bend. His neck was pulled perfectly straight, and he bellowed almost constantly; but there was no yielding. He was plucky and game to the last.

Tighter and tighter became the tension, until the body of the snake elongated, and became as rigid as iron.

"If I was only there, to draw my jack-knife across it," muttered Smith, who was deeply interested in the contest. "It would take only a nick to make that body crack in two like a piece of India rubber."

"The bull will crack it for him, if his nose doesn't give out," replied Martin.

"That can't be possible."

For full fifteen minutes the snake pulled and pulled.

He would relax his tension, then instantly renew it, then cease, and then renew it again. If the fool had only drawn his tail out of the mud, he might have crushed the animal to a jelly almost in an instant; but he hadn't enough sense for that, nor enough prudence to withdraw his fangs, when he discovered there was no possibility of embracing the quadruped. Again and again he repeated his efforts, until weak and tired he ceased for a respite.

It was now the old bull's turn. The moment he comprehended the strait of his adversary, he began retreating inch by inch. He raised each foot very carefully, for he was on the lookout for any sudden *coup de main*.

The snake allowed himself to be drawn out perhaps a foot, when he concentrated all the terrible strength under his control, and made a counter movement, with such power that the feet of the bull sank deeper and deeper than ever in the mud, and he howled and lashed his tail in agony.

But never a jot did he yield. He would have allowed his head to be pulled from his body before doing so. The enormous strain of the reptile lasted but a moment, when it became comparatively lax again.

That very instant the bull recommenced his retreat. Inch by inch, as before, but surely and unmistakably, was he "drawing out" his mortal enemy. The latter resisted to the utmost of his power, but it was all of no avail.

Longer and longer became that dark, hideous mass, and thinner, until it seemed as taut as if made of iron.

"Pull away, my fine fellow," exclaimed John Mar-

tin. "You are a plucky customer. You being a bull, are a fit representative of Hold Hengland. A little stronger, but careful."

"Yes; be careful," admonished the New Englander, rising in the canoe; "be careful, or you'll bust your nose."

In the dreadful conflict that was going on, the bull appeared to understand that he had friends, and the latter even fancied that they saw his great brown eyes wink knowingly toward them.

Strongly and steadily the four-footed contestant applied his strength, which was prodigious, and his adversary began to suffer the same pain that he was enduring; but the noble fellow never for a moment ceased his efforts, although every inch that he withdrew added a pang to the extremity of his sufferings.

Matters were approaching a crisis; they could not remain long as they were, and the issue was sooner than the spectators expected.

With a wild snort, the bull gave a swing of his head, and at the same moment, the body of the snake snapped in two, about three feet from the head.

Whirling around, the rejoicing quadruped dashed away with the remarkable appendage dangling from his nose.

"What will he do to get rid of that?" inquired Martin, as Jose applied his paddle, and they began to approach the other shore.

"Run around for a week or two with that hanging to his nose, then it'll drop off."

"He's as plucky a bull as one which my father owned in Connecticut. When they built the railroad

through our place, the old man turned the bull into the field. And when he saw the engine coming along, he threw up his tail and charged down the road to meet it. They came together with a crash that sounded like an earthquake. I saw the pieces fly, and immediately ran to the spot. The locomotive was all staved in; and as for the bull, all that we ever found of him was one horn and *the tip of his tail!*"

CHAPTER IV.

VALEQUERO AND HIS DAUGHTER.

The friend of Jose, the guide—Valequero by name—dwelt but a comparatively short distance from the Orinoco. He was a man of considerable means, and for a number of years had kept a sort of inn within this South American wilderness—if such a thing can be considered possible.

The house of Valequero was mentioned as far away as Rio Janeiro, and always in the best of terms. Amid the varied species of South American population it thus happened that he frequently entertained people whose character was not above suspicion. His arrangements were such that he could accommodate some thirty or forty when put to the pinch, although his ordinary accommodations were for less than half that number.

Valequero never questioned his guests, and never knew anything regarding their business; that is, he never admitted that he knew anything, although, beyond all doubt, he had many strange secrets stored in that reticent brain of his.

He made it his business to attend to the physical comforts of his guests, to treat them kindly, to admit them when they chose to come, and allow them to depart at whatever hour they elected, whether it was midday or midnight.

Valequero had been a widower for several years. His housekeeper was a stolid, silent woman, who resembled an intelligent machine more than anything else—working, toiling and drudging, days at a time, without as much as changing a word with those around her.

Valequero had a daughter, Nina by name, who seemed the opposite of her father in almost every respect. She had his jet black eyes, and his raven tresses, and his Greek nose; but here the analogy closed. He was sturdy and heavy, she as light and buoyant as a fawn; he silent, almost to moroseness, she as talkative as a child, and with a flow of spirits that never failed her.

Nina had not yet reached the years of womanhood; but in that rich, tropical climate she had fully matured, and was a creature that might well be compared to the brilliant birds that serve to relieve the monotony of the gloomy South American forests. She was talkative and lively to all who came beneath her father's roof, but never forward.

"Woman's weakness is her strength," and the perfect innocence and simplicity of Nina, under the kind hand of Heaven, had shielded her from all insult and harm. Many a rough, untamed Llanero, who had paused at her house, and who held the most abased opinions of woman-kind, had had their thoughts purified, and their natures bettered by the words and conduct of this young rose of the wilderness.

Valequero, although very undemonstrative in his nature, loved his daughter with an affection that was almost idolatrous. He would have faced death at any time for her sake, and woe to the man who offered her harm or insult in his presence.

Peleg Smith was fairly dazzled by the wit and beauty of Nina. He and Martin were some distance away, when they saw her flit across the covered porch that extended along the front of the house.

"I swaeow—eh! hello! By gracious! who's that? My ears didn't deceive my eye-sight," said he, rubbing his eyes, and looking around him in a bewildered manner. "Martin, that was a girl of the feminine gender that passed my vision, wasn't it?"

"Hi think so; that is, if it wasn't any other person," replied the Englishman, betraying considerable interest in the case.

"It beats all—I never seen the like—reminds me of Jerusha Jewhillikins, up in Connecticut—weighs a hundred and ninety-three pounds—three and a half feet high in her stocking feet—wears shoes number elevens—hair red, etc., etc."

"How can this delicate piece of horganism remind you of such a squash?" asked Martin, his face growing red at this affront offered the beautiful girl."

"She's a gal, Jerusha, ain't she?"

"I s'pose so; has that is a female happellation."

"Wal, this stranger is a gal, hain't she?"

"Hi am well satisfied hon that point."

"Wal, then, why shouldn't I be reminded?"

"Hi see the point; Hi didn't get at your meaning at first; Hi understan—no 'ard feelings, you know, Smith; Hi didn't mean anything," replied Martin, in his good-natured, jocose manner.

"All right, then—needn't say anything more about it. My gracious! where's my dog? Here, Pugg!"

Peleg Smith screwed up his mouth, and whistled very industriously for a few moments, entirely oblivious to everything else that was going on around

him. This labor was speedily rewarded by Pugg, who came tumbling forward, seemingly as rejoiced to meet his master as the latter was to meet him.

Smith now turned to Jose, the guide:

"Say, Jose, who is she?" jerking his thumb in a mysterious manner over his shoulder toward the inn.

"Who mean?"

"That piece of mechanism of the feminine gender that flitted to view a moment or two since."

"Nina Valequero, daughter of my friend the inn-keeper."

"You don't say! Married?"

"Only a child."

"Just so—a child at a very interesting age. Been a sweet baby, I s'pose, and it's kept growing on her ever since."

"Fine girl, everybody likes her."

"Just so; but they don't *love* her."

"Her father does."

"You know what I mean. She hain't got any fellers hanging round that pretend that the father is a very entertainin' old boss, when they mean her all the time?"

"Valequero don't say a dozen words a year."

"All right; then I s'pose the gal does the rest. Nina, you said her name was?"

"Yes, Nina."

"I hope," said Martin, in a very timid manner, "she doesn't entertain any prejudice against Old England, or those that claim that country as the place of their nativity?"

Jose smiled at the soberness of both his employers, and hastened to reply.

"She be kind and respectful to all who come."

"You will give me an introduction, Jose?" said Smith, in an anxious manner.

"Tell her you're from the United States?"

"Yes, by gracious! I ain't ashamed of that, and never will be. Pr'aps, Martin would like to have you say the same thing about him."

"Him from Hoid Hengland, and proud of it. Hof course, Jose will make us both acquainted. Lead on."

Peleg Smith removed his cap, and spitting upon his fingers, began to twist his hair into proper position, and also to endeavor to give a smart expression generally to his countenance. Thus occupied, the trio, accompanied by Pugg, stepped upon the porch of the inn.

CHAPTER V

AT THE INN.

Peleg Smith was still twisting his hair into fanciful ringlets, and John Martin was looking bland and dignified, when Jose, the guide, opened the door of the room which answered the purpose of the sitting-room. The New Englander glanced around the large apartment, and saw that it was empty of everything except themselves, and a moderate quantity of plain furniture.

"Where is she? Where is Nina?" he asked of the guide.

"She will soon be here"—

The words were still in the mouth of Jose, when a door swung open, and a vision of loveliness glided in. She was smiling and radiant, and was on the point of speaking without an introduction, when the guide spoke in Spanish.

"Nina, allow me to introduce to you my two friends, Mr. Smith, from the United States, and Mr. Martin, from England. They are traveling in this country, and wish to remain awhile at your father's inn."

The girl curtseyed very gracefully; and Martin, whose face resembled a full moon, bowed as politely as a cavalier. Peleg Smith rather overdid the matter

by first curtseying in the same manner as their fair hostess, and then bowing very low, and giving his goodly-sized foot a great scrape upon the floor.

"It gives me great pleasure to receive my foreign friends," said Nina, waving them to a seat.

"Beg pardon," said Smith, "I am not a foreigner. I was born in Connecticut. Hello! yes I am, too! By Gracious! how odd it sounds to hear yourself called a foreigner when you ain't used to it."

Nina smiled as she comprehended the mistake of her guest. The latter, as well as his companion, were agreeably surprised to hear her speak English so well. True, there was an imperfect accent occasionally, but it only lent a charm to her sweet words.

"Is this your first visit to South America?" she inquired.

"Yes," replied both, and Smith added, "Mr. Martin and myself have traveled considerably. But he is ahead of me; I have been over the greater part of Europe, while he has visited every country."

"Not hevery one, begging your pardon," corrected Martin. "Hi 'aven't been to the United States, yet. Hi reserve that pleasure until Hi have finished your beautiful country."

"And you are pleased with what you have seen of this neighborhood?"

"Y-a-s," drawled Smith, as he recalled the little wriggling reptiles that clustered in the trees over his head when in the canoe, and remembered how closely he and his friend ran to an embrace with the great serpent that lay coiled in the mud. "Y-a-s, I am pleased—that is *mostly*."

"There are a great many animals and birds in the woods," said Martin. "Hi've never seen a country

that so abounded with animal life, except some portions of Hafrica perhaps."

Nina, who had lived all her lifetime in this one spot, and who was familiar with the facts referred to by her guests, could not understand that there was any extraordinary number of wild beasts and reptiles.

"Are there not as many in the United States as you find here?" she inquired, directing her gaze straight at the blushing face of Peleg Smith.

"My gracious, no! You might hang out all night in the woods there, and never hear of a wild animal or a serpent. You might bathe for a week in the rivers without being ever disturbed by the cariboes or alligators, for we never have such critters there."

Nina opened her eyes in genuine astonishment.

"That must be a delightful country to live in!"

"It is the greatest country in all creation, is the United States; and the Americans are the greatest people that ever was born," added Smith, growing more enthusiastic than polite. "They've got a civil war now, but they'll soon straighten themselves out, and then they'll be stronger and greater than ever."

"Have you ever heard of any country or clime for which you would hexchange your own?" asked Martin of Nina.

The latter smiled archly.

"I have heard many accounts from travelers of strange countries and people, that I would much love to see; but there is no place on this earth that I would give in exchange for home."

"And there is none where I shall be content to die except in Old England. So, my friend Smith, all people do not think alike regarding your country."

"Home is home, I s'pose. Wherever a man has been a baby, I s'pose he will always be a baby ; that's why you two love your native places. The reason why I love the United States is because I was born there, and because she is the all-firedest nation on the face of the airth."

Jose had left the room the moment after Nina entered, and he now made his appearance with the announcement that dinner was waiting. Both of our adventurers, in spite of the pleasant and novel circumstances surrounding them, were ravenously hungry, and they received this notice with delight—not that they were anxious to rid themselves of their delightful company—not that they loved Nina less, but they loved their dinner more.

Their hostess led the way into the dining-room, which would have compared favorably with many a similar apartment in our country hotels. Here a substantial meal was prepared, to which, it is not necessary to say, the two did ample justice.

Nina sat at the head of the table, and presided with a charming grace peculiar to herself. While eating the genial Martin had nothing to say, unless directly addressed. As the appetite of Smith became partly satiated, he grew talkative and loquacious.

"We are the only guests you have, I suppose?"

"All that we have at present. Last week we had several ; and sometimes we have a dozen."

"Just so. Where do they all come from?"

Nina smiled.

"I cannot tell, nor whither they go."

"Is it possible? In our country the hotels have a large book, and every guest has to write his name in it, and tell where he is from, where he is going, and

what his business is, and whether he has got any children, and if he has ever had the measles"—

"Hold on," called out Martin; "I must record that remarkable fact," and taking his note-book, he immediately put it in writing, and then resumed his meal.

Jose, at this juncture, arose and went to the window. When he returned, he announced that a storm was gathering in the sky, and it would be imprudent to continue their journey before the morrow. But Martin and Smith were glad of an excuse to remain at Valequero's inn, and they immediately stated that they would not start before the morrow.

In the evening the three (exclusive of the guide) were gathered in the sitting-room, and were just in the midst of an interesting conversation, when a thundering knock upon the door gave notice of the arrival of strangers

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGERS.

The door was instantly opened by Nina. As it was drawn back upon its hinges, she dimly discerned the figures of three men in the darkness.

"Can Senor Valequero admit three lodgers to-night?" one of them inquired in a gruff voice, without offering to move until the question was answered.

"He never turns any one away. Come in out of the storm."

"I thank you; we have horses that need rest more than their masters; we will attend to them at first."

At this juncture, Valequero appeared upon the scene, and invited the visitors within, taking charge of their animals at the same time. They instantly accepted the invitation and came stamping into the room.

The foremost drew back, as if displeased at the presence of others in the same room; but recovering himself, the three scowled at our two friends and took the proffered seats without a word.

The new comers were a suspicious trio. They wore long spurs, rich cloaks and heavy slouched hats that came down to their very eyes; and as they kept their cloaks drawn closely around their faces, nothing but their jet black orbs or heavy moustaches were vis-

ible. Seating themselves by the fire, they sat silent and moody.

At the moment they entered, Martin was enjoying a cigaretto. Rising to his feet, he offered one to each. The first one hesitated a moment before accepting it, but finally they all did so, not forgetting to thank the genial-hearted fellow.

Peleg Smith crossed his legs, took out his jack-knife, and busied himself in whittling a stick that lay on the hearth—for the cold storm had made a fire necessary in spite of the low latitude. Finally he addressed himself to the nearest:

“A stormy night, my friend.”

The fellow looked at him, as if uncertain whether he was addressed, but he made no reply.

“Did you come very far to-night?”

Still not the least notice was taken of his query. Smith began to hitch uneasily in his chair.

“Didn’t bring your wife with you, I see. Left her home, I s’pose, to attend the children.”

No reply. Martin began to smile quietly, for he was enjoying the scene. He said nothing, and continued puffing at his cigar.

“Any children grown up? Where might you hail from? Never been in the United States, I s’pose, now?”

The man began to manifest annoyance at this continued quizzing. He turned and looked full in the face of Smith and gave a scowl that made him appear more repulsive than ever. He then turned his head away and smoked terrifically at his cigaretto, as if he would fain hide himself from view. But Smith was not to be bluffed in this manner. He turned and looked deliberately in the faces of the other two, but

as neither of these had spoken a word, except to thank Martin, he concluded it would be a waste of time to address them.

"I am Peleg Smith from Connecticut. I didn't quite get your name, I b'lieve. Just give it again."

The inveterate questioner inclined his head as if to listen, but no words greeted his ear.

"I didn't hear you, I say. Blast you! Go to blazes, then, if you don't want to talk to a gentleman! I wouldn't speak to you anyhow!"

At this point the man addressed crossed his legs. As he did so, a fold of his cloak was displaced, and displayed to the gaze of John Martin the handle and a portion of the glittering blade of a knife. The Englishman had traveled far enough to understand the fiery temperament of the natives of tropical countries, and he saw that his companion was unconsciously toying with a dangerous character. He did not expect such a burst as this, and he was startled when it did come. He hastened to avert the consequence.

"Our friends don't wish to talk, Mr. Smith. I would therefore suggest that you do not interrupt them."

"Oh, hang 'em! I don't care anything about 'em. They needn't put on airs. I don't believe they are any better than other folks. I wouldn't talk with 'em if they wanted me to"

The fires in the heart of the hot-blooded American flashed up, but he did nothing, and why he did not will appear in the course of our story.

During the most part of this interview, Nina had been out of the room, employed in preparing the evening meal. She now announced that it was ready, and the three took their departure from the apart-

ment. Our friends having dined but an hour previous, of course did not join them.

When they had gone, Martin spoke seriously :

"Smith, you're doing something dangerous in trifling with that man. Ii don't like the looks of either of the three."

"Nor I either, hang 'em. But you don't s'pose I'm *afraid* on 'em, do you?"

"No. But Ii always travel on the motto that it's better to make a friend than a henemy. Those three men are ugly customers, but if there's any friendship in their hearts they feel it towards me."

"That may all be, Martin, but when I come across a man that feels too big to answer decent questions, I don't care a cent whether he is a friend or not."

"Something tells me that there'll be some trouble from this. When that man moved his cloak I saw the handle of a knife."

"Do you see that?" asked Smith, in a whisper, as he drew a six-shooter from his pocket. "Do you see that? I never travel without that, and it's never unloaded. I think it's about as useful an ornament as a knife; and if those three gentlemen want to make a trial to find out whether it is so or not, I am perfectly willing."

"Ii'm glad you carry that revolver, for you'll need it often enough in this country. You'll find that the people in the hot countries are passionate and dangerous when excited."

"I know that," returned Smith, "I was expecting some outbreak, and was ready. My hand was on my revolver, and if he'd have whipped out his knife, he would have been met by a bullet. I ain't so green, perhaps, as you think."

The two were conversing in very earnest tones. Their voices were low, and they glanced furtively toward the door, in the momentary expectation of the advent of the strangers. It was not long before they reappeared, when, of course, this subject of conversation was changed.

The men were moody and silent as usual; while Smith and Martin conversed about ordinary topics until evening was far advanced. Nina then appeared, and conducted them to their sleeping apartments. When they were alone, Martin said, as he proceeded to fasten the door.

"You're a Yankee, Ii believe, and can help to secure this door. It won't do to trust those fellows."

Nothing loth, Smith set to work, and with the ingenuity characteristic of his race, soon locked the door in a manner that made it impossible to be forced without awakening them.

CHAPTER VII.

OMINOUS.

Peleg Smith slept soundly, which fact was made evident to all within the house by his sonorous breathing, which at times threatened to jar the building to its very foundation. This rattling would not have disturbed the easy-tempered Martin, had he not another matter to occupy his mind.

It was not often that anything occurred to deprive the jovial Englishman of his night's rest, but he felt to-night as though the three strangers who were under the same roof with him were evil-disposed toward him and his companion. He regretted the rashness of the latter, but still believed, had he acted in a gentlemanly manner, the disposition of the strangers toward them would have been the same.

Civil law, even in the cities of South America, is weak enough. In the back country there are sections where there is no pretence that it is swayed. Might makes right, and a man's strong arm and brave heart, under heaven, is his only protection.

Fully conscious of this, and knowing with what jealous hatred all foreigners were regarded by the lower classes of the South Americans, it is evident that John Martin had good reasons for suspecting the motives of the strangers. His mind being fully aroused to the

peril hanging over him, he concluded to remain awake all night and listen for the signs of danger.

Time passes slowly to one who is watching and waiting. The hours dragged slowly by to Martin, and despite the resolve he had made to lie awake until morning, he found himself passing off into a semi-conscious doze, and when midnight came around he was almost entirely oblivious of external things.

In this condition, when his nerves were in that state that they were the most susceptible to impression, he was aroused by hearing a stealthy footstep approaching his chamber door. For a moment his senses were confused, but the next instant he was wide awake.

His heart gave a great throb when the step paused before the door, and he heard the latch cautiously lifted. The door yielded slightly to the pressure brought to bear; but it had been too firmly secured by the genius of Smith to yield entirely.

The next demonstration was a trying with the fastening. Martin could hear the point of a knife working cautiously, as if the man were expecting to "pick the lock" in this manner. This was continued for some time, when the would-be burglar or assassin withdrew, and all was silent again.

Martin now fell asleep and slept soundly until broad daylight. When he awoke, Smith was up, standing by the window. As soon as he perceived the Englishman to be awake, he said:

"Martin, were you at work at the lock last night, trying to make it stronger than I had made it?"

"Hi 'aven't touched the door since we retired."

"Somebody has, at any rate."

"It was those fellows trying to get in to cut our throats."

"How do you know?"

"Hi 'eard them in the night."

"Why didn't you wake me?"

"What use? They couldn't get in after you had secured the door."

"I know that, my gracious! But I should have opened the door and give them a taste of six-shooter."

"Hi'm glad Hi didn't wake you, then," returned Martin, busying himself with his toilet. "They're bad men, and Hi 'ope we shan't encounter them again."

"They're taking themselves off," said Smith, looking out of the window. "Just come here for one moment."

The Englishman stepped up beside his friend and saw at once he was not mistaken. The three strangers were in the act of mounting their horses. The latter were fine-looking animals, fiery and high-mettled, and their owners sat them splendidly.

As they turned to ride away, they waved a farewell to Nina, who was standing upon the porch. As they did so, the leading character of the night before chanced to look up at the window where Smith was standing. Probably observing that their motions were watched, the fellow made a threatening signal with his hand, whereupon the Yankee very coolly applied his thumb to his nose, and twiddled his fingers in token of contempt.

"Good-by, old scowl-face. If you want to threaten Peleg Smith, blaze away, and you'll find him ready."

Martin had been somewhat touched at the demonstration of the dusky stranger, and he therefore did not attempt to check Smith in his retaliatory compliment. In fact, ever since the suspicious tinkering at

his chamber door, the honest-hearted Englishman had come to entertain a very low estimate of the men with whom he had smoked a cigarette upon the evening previous. Jocular and jolly as he generally was, he was yet very sensitive upon points of honor, and could ill brook an insult from any one, especially one of these quick-tempered, half-civilized beings whom he had treated with such politeness.

Shortly after, our two friends descended to breakfast. The storm had cleared away, the sun was shining, and the morning was one of those, such as are seen only in the tropical regions. The wilderness was alive with animal life. The screaming, warbling and singing of birds, the chattering of monkeys, the occasional howl of some animal made the air fairly deafening at times. A nervous man would have gone crazy; but, as neither of our heroes was subject to that infirmity, they suffered nothing in consequence.

Nina was as cheerful and radiant as usual. She chatted gaily, and Smith began to entertain the thought that he had made an impression upon her heart. While he was holding this belief, the bland John Martin began to ask himself:

“Why does this fair girl watch me so intently? It is not an ordinary gaze that she bestows upon me. There is some deep meaning in it. What meaning can it be unless—ahem! Ii’ve himpressed her favorably?”

The sagacious Jose simply looked on, and smiled. He read in the faces of his friends their emotions, and quietly enjoyed it. He knew that the beautiful girl had impressed both, but that she entertained no feeling except those of friendship toward them.

Finally the breakfast was finished, and the horses

were brought to the door. It was the intention of Martin and Smith to journey toward the head waters of the Orinoco. This would lead through a wild country, where vegetation was of the most luxurious kind, and where animal life seemed literally to be overflowing. There was a prospect of endless and varied adventure; and although both were loth to leave their fair hostess, yet they viewed with great pleasure the prospect before them.

Farewells were gaily exchanged; and the three were riding away, when Nina called to Smith to return. The latter came back with great alacrity, thinking, perhaps, she wished to make a confession of love before his departure. As he leaned over the saddle she looked around to see that her father did not observe her, and then said in a low tone:

"Be careful of those men who were here. They want to kill you."

"Tell me their names."

"I know only Pedro, who shook his head at you."

Smith thanked her for the information, and then galloped away to join his companions.

CHAPTER VII

BULL VS. BULL.

Our friends, under the leadership of Jose, took a sort of bridle-path that ran parallel to the course pursued by the three strangers. While they did not fear these men, yet knowing their treacherous nature, they were perfectly willing never to encounter them again. They knew there were no means too dishonorable for them to adopt to secure their coveted revenge, and it was the part of prudence, therefore, to let them alone.

In some places, in the dark soil of the woods, the vegetation was so exuberant, so matted and crowded overhead, that their path was wrapped in a semi-darkness, as if the sun had gone down. It came to the minds of both Englishman and Yankee, although neither gave utterance to it, that in such places, an assassin could pick off one of their number without a possibility of incurring danger. In fact, these three strangers could empty each saddle, and leave the bones to moulder and rot without so much as one ever suspecting their fate.

In the midst of his reverie Smith was aroused by being smartly switched in the face by an overhanging limb.

"Gosh, hang it!" he exclaimed; "this is the all-firedest country I ever traveled in. Population made up of alligators, snakes, bulls, monkeys and assassins."

Can't ask a decent question, but what you run a risk of getting knifed. Hang 'em! let them knife me if they want to try it; they'll larn what stuff Peleg Smith is made of. If they ever catch me with my revolver unloaded, they orter make mince meat of me."

"They are somewhat like the Italian," replied Martin, alluding to the inhabitants of this portion of South America; "quick-tempered and passionate."

"Wuss! ten times wuss! When I was in Rome, I seen the Pope one day, and hollered out to him, and axed him for a chaw of tobacco. Some old Italian muttered something, and looked at me kind of savage like, when I fetched him a swipe that knocked him over a woman's orange stand, and then waited for him to get up to see what he proposed to do about it."

"And what did he do, pray?"

"Nothing; he just picked up his old umbrella of a hat and slunk away. A tall young fellow, seeing the rumpus, come running up to find out the straight of it. The old fellow muttered something spirited at me, whereupon the young gander-legs made a rush at me. Wal, I just squashed him—laid him out like a pancake, and piled two or three barrels on top of him to hold him there awhile."

"Extraordinary!"

"Now, you see, if them Italians had been Orinocans"—

"Been what?"

"Orinocans. That means people that live along the Orinoco; they'd gone to using knives instead of putting up decently with the squashing I gave them."

"There are not many Italians but what would have done the same thing—hello!"

The last exclamation was caused by the party

emerging from the woods, and entering upon a broad open plain. This was covered with a species of luxuriant grass, and, in short, was a savannah or prairie. The day by this time had become quite hot, and it looked rather uninviting to ride out from the cool shade of the trees into the scorching blaze of the sun upon the savannah.

And yet the mental relief experienced in escaping, from the treacherous gloom of the woods was so great that neither of the three hesitated a moment. They reined their animals down to a moderate walk, for they knew their strength and endurance would be needed, and began crossing the burning plain.

The aim of Jose was to strike a small stream of water where they would take their noon-day siesta, and travel several miles further in the cool of the day, and then encamp for the night. They had proceeded but a few miles, when the heat became almost intolerable, and Smith proposed that they should make for a grove of trees lying to their left.

This proposition was gladly acceded to, and the little party proceeded to act upon it at once. It required a half-hour's moderate ride, when they reined in beneath the grateful shade of the trees, dismounted and made preparations for several hours' rest.

Martin produced his Havanas, and while he and Smith enjoyed these, Jose busied himself in getting their noon-day meal prepared.

The grove was of considerable extent—so much so that it was impossible for the eye to take in its length and breadth from any single point. Jose, with his experience and knowledge, should have known better than to have entered its precincts without first recon-

noitering it to ascertain whether it concealed any lurking danger.

Martin and Smith were in the midst of the enjoyment of their cigars, indulging in a lazy, sleepy conversation, when they were startled by a terrible thrashing and thumping, followed by the wild cry of Jose, their guide.

"The bull! the bull! the bull! Lie down, quick!"

Instead of obeying this injunction, Smith sprang to his feet, and looked furtively around him, while Martin simply raised himself on his elbow, and looked calmly in the direction of the turmoil.

"It is hextraordinary that a bull"—

"By gracious! he's coming!" exclaimed Smith, in an excited manner, jerking off his coat as if he were about to begin cutting wood, and then running for a tree. The bull, whose domain had been invaded in this rude manner, caught sight of the flying man, and drove after him at full speed, not noticing the recumbent figure of the goodly-sized Englishman.

Smith caught a glimpse of this enraged Taurus, and throwing his arms around a small tree trunk, commenced ascending it with all the skill and speed at his command. But great as was his celerity, it did not begin to equal that of the bull's. Coming directly beneath the ascending Smith, he gave his massive head an upward fling, and striking him in the fairest manner possible, tumbled him headlong among the limbs, which he frantically seized, and quickly drew himself beyond all danger.

"Hang you! come up here, if you want to raise a row!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist at the stamping bull. "You needn't bow your head and scrape your

feet in that manner, for I know you done it on purpose."

"This is hextraordinary!" soliloquized Martin, as he came deliberately to his feet. "This bull has no right to break in on us in this manner. It is houtra" —

The infuriated animal had caught sight of the man as he began rising to his feet, and dashed after him. Not observing his proximity, the Englishman was suddenly interrupted in the midst of his soliloquy by a tremendous thump in his rear, that caused him to turn several summersaults. The consequences might have been serious, had not Jose made his appearance at this critical moment, and with a well-aimed shot, laid the bull dead in his tracks.

CHAPTER IX.

MONKEYS.

"This is hextraordinary!" exclaimed Martin, as he arose to his feet and chafed the injured portions of his body. "Hi gave that bull no occasion for henmity. It seems the hanimals partake of the same nature with the men."

"You come in his home—no like it," said Jose.

"'Ow! Hi don't understand."

"He think this place he own—no let people come here—drive 'em out."

"Hoh! Hi understand! Well, Jose, let me suggest that you take a look round to see whether there hare any other bulls that claim the same property. Hif there is, perhaps it would be best to throw up a fort to defend ourselves."

At this point, Peleg Smith made his appearance.

"That's the infarnalest way of serving a feller. That bull is worse than Deacon Jones's. I went out to feed that rip one day and he took after me. Wal, sir, I run behind a barn to git out the way, but that critter felt too savage to turn out for the barn. He made a lunge at it and went straight through, just as though the boards were nothing but wet paper! He kept right on down the road, with his head down, thinking I was before him, till he caught sight of a

big oak tree. Smash into that he went, and when the deacon and I went down with crowbars to pry the bull out, we found his head sticking out one side and his tail the other. We pried and pried, but couldn't stir him till we sawed down the tree and split it open, and then the blasted ungrateful hulks batted us all over the fence to pay for it."

"Hextraordinary! They sometimes call me Hold Bull, but I wasn't equal to that bull, that's certain."

"Wal, he's dead as a door nail, and I propose we celebrate our victory over him by making a dinner out of his body. He appears to be in a good condition."

Jose proceeded to act upon the suggestion at once. He was experienced and skilled in such matters, and it was not long before a fine piece of beef was cooking over the blaze. Martin produced another couple of cigars, and in a few moments he and Smith were in the quiet enjoyment of them.

"Martin," said the latter, "s'pose we keep on going west till we strike the Andes, and then get to the Pacific coast, and go home that way."

"No 'urry, Hi s'pose."

"No; we can take a year to it as well as not."

"Don't know as Hi've any objections."

"We ought to get there in a few months. What in blazes is Pugg barking at?"

The little dog had gone farther into the wood, where he evidently had something at bay, if anything was to be judged by the fierceness of his barking.

"Perhaps Jose knows what's the matter," added Smith, as he turned towards the guide. "Jose, what has that dog treed?"

"Monkeys," was the sententious reply of the guide,

as he busied himself with the preparation of the dinner.

"Hi saw one a few moments ago," said Martin. "We're in a country where they're very numerous."

He had scarcely spoken when a sort of chattering was heard above them, and looking up they saw a half dozen of the grotesque animals whisking from limb to limb, and evidently greatly astonished and indignant that any human being should invade their domain, where probably the foot of man never trod before.

Smith rising to his feet and shouting, they sprang away, and soon disappeared among the thick foliage overhead. From the increased chattering it was evident that they had joined their companions in tormenting the fiery little quadruped.

Finally Jose announced that dinner was ready, and the three gathered around the simple "board." The rich, juicy beef was flanked by some luscious fruit, and the midday meal was one such as has few superiors even in civilized communities.

When the dinner was completed and they had taken their smoke and rest, and talked about starting, Martin consulted his repeater and Smith his ball's-eye, and found to their astonishment, that the long afternoon was already more than half advanced.

Upon referring to Jose, they learned that the spot selected for their night's encampment was several hours' ride away, and as the afternoon was very sultry and oppressive, they concluded to remain where they were until morning. There was no earthly necessity of hurrying, and they wisely determined not to do so.

John Martin's experience in the tropical regions of the Old World had taught him how to employ many

conveniences, that a man less inclined to luskiness would have deemed impossible. Among these was a portable framework, connected by a strong canvas, which could be compressed into a small space, and when unlimbered, made a cosy cot. As he expected on each of his extended journeys to lose all that he possessed except his life, he generally carried two or three of those with him, in order that he might enjoy their solace as long as possible. Thus it happened that he possessed the means of giving Smith and Jose an aerial couch.

Such a means of sleeping is the only kind endurable for foreigners in tropical countries. The countless reptiles and poisonous serpents that always cluster around a camp-fire—the wild animals that are attracted by the glare—render such a course the only perfectly safe one, leaving entirely out the question of comfort and convenience.

As the afternoon wore away, and the night came on, our friends gained a realizing idea of the wonderful exuberance of animal life in this tropical region. The woods seemed overflowing with wild animals, the hiss of serpents could be heard at uncomfortably close distances, and overhead all manner of bats were whirling hither and thither.

While it was yet light, Jose had secured the cots in the limbs above. Martin's was about thirty feet from the ground—as high as there was any necessity of its being. The guide's was not quite so high, while Smith's, at his special request, was very nearly fifty feet from the ground. He had heard of tremendous springs made by wild animals, and he had no wish that any "varmint should land in his couch to sleep with him."

It was late when they retired. It was no easy task to climb into their respective couches; but when our friends got there, they had the consolation of feeling that they were safe. In a few moments all were sound asleep.

Martin rested nearly under Smith. The former had been asleep about an hour, when he awoke. Above the unceasing din in the night-air could be heard the terrific snoring of the Yankee, entirely oblivious of what was going on around him. His cot was dimly discernible. As Martin looked up, he fancied he saw something resembling the figure of a man hanging over the couch of Smith, and apparently busy at something. Thoughts of the three dusky strangers flashed over him, and he caught up his revolver. He was on the point of calling out, when the cot and Smith came tumbling together through the limbs, and both came down with a prodigious thump to the ground.

"Gosh hangnation! who done that?" called out the incensed New Englander.

The vociferous chattering disclosed all to Martin, who shouted:

"My friend, Smith, them 'orrid monkeys done it. Come up 'ere, and I'll try and make room for you."

Smith did as requested, and the night passed away without further disturbance.

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE OCCURRENCE.

"Gosh hang such a country!" exclaimed Peleg Smith, when all had descended to the ground in the morning. "I don't like it, and propose we fall back to Valequero's, and take a start for the Atlantic seaboard."

"Hit is a 'orrid country!" replied Martin. "The monkeys gave you a bad fall."

"They like to've broke my neck. I was in the middle of a delightful dream about Jerusha Ann at home. I thought we were just married, and I'd helped her in the carriage, and was going to join her when my foot slipped, and down I come heels over head out of the tree."

"Hit you'd fallen all the way without 'itting the limbs, you would have broke your neck."

"Hitting the limbs! It seemed I struck every one between me and the ground. I came near sawing my neck off on one that catched me under the chin, and another hit me in the neck. I s'pose it broke my fall, but it pretty nearly broke my back to do it. What do you say, Martin, let's go back?"

Now, to tell the truth, our good-natured friend, the Englishman, much preferred to take the "back track."

They had already penetrated far enough into the wilds of South America. They were already "half-full" of adventure, and it stood to reason that by the time they reached a seaboard town, they would be fully satisfied.

Such were Martin's feelings, but he did not choose to appear too eager, and smoked awhile in silence.

"Perhaps it would be prudent to return. We have penetrated to a goodly distance, and seen enough of the northern portion of South America. We can sail down to Rio Janeiro, and explore Brazil, if such should be our desire after getting out of the wilderness."

"It's settled, then, I s'pose," returned Smith, in a pleased tone. "We can stay at Valequero's to-night."

Martin started. Until this moment he had not thought of Pedro and his guilty companions. Valequero's inn and they were inseparable in his mind, and he had no wish to encounter these bad men again.

"Suppose they are there," he said, speaking aloud his thoughts.

"Whom do you mean?"

"Pedro, and his comrades. I suspect they frequent Valequero's inn quite frequently. We may run against them."

"By gracious! I hope we shall. I should like to give that Pedro a taste of Yankee thunder! I don't believe he has much respect for Americans, and I'd like to larn him a thing or two."

For a few moments Martin meditated recalling the assent he had given, but it was only for a moment.

Nothing was to be gained by going further west, and the probabilities were that they would be as likely to escape the three strangers as to encounter them. They would stay at Valequero's but a single evening, and leave at the earliest dawn—that is if they could get up early enough.

Jose received the announcement of a retrograde movement with considerable surprise. He said little, however, as he knew his position too well to question the orders of his employers.

The day proved fully as hot as the preceding; and our friends had not crossed half the intervening savannah when they experienced the physical discomforts of a tropical sun. Straight overhead the sun seemed to dart down a furnace heat upon their bodies. Martin continually mopped his brow with his handkerchief, and occasionally repeated that it was a "horrid country, much reminding 'im of Haffrica." Smith, although unquestionably suffering from the extreme heat, did not appear to perspire in the least. Now and then he muttered, "Gosh hang it!" or "By gracious!" as his faithful animal plodded wearily onward. Pugg, the dog, seemed to enjoy the day, and trotted leisurely forward.

Once within the dark coolness of the woods, their sufferings were at an end. All remarked the change of temperature, and all hailed it with gladness. Martin was ready to conclude that it was not such an "horrid country" after all; and Smith affirmed that it reminded him of the genial clime of his own native Connecticut.

The noon-day encampment was made beneath the shelter of a huge tree. Valequero's inn could have

been easily reached by this time ; but our friends preferred to arrive there at nightfall, although it must be confessed that both Martin and Smith rather longed for the time that they should be permitted, for however brief a period, to enjoy the charming society of Nina Valequero.

Most of the afternoon, therefore, was spent in lounging in the grateful shade, smoking, chatting and sleeping. Jose acted as a sentinel—not against human beings, but against animals, reptiles and insects.

Several poisonous serpents were killed within a short distance of the camp-fire, and one of these was in startling proximity to the sleeping form of Martin.

Had it bitten him, however, it is doubtful whether he would have experienced any inconvenience, as he had been bitten several times in Africa, without any discomfort following.

The afternoon was quite well advanced, when Jose aroused our friend, and they made instant preparations for resuming their journey. All their horses had procured sufficient forage, and were in the best of condition.

Pugg, as usual, was barking furiously at some foe that was at bay in the grass.

Upon approaching, Smith saw some hideous reptile, resembling a gigantic spider, drawn up in a spiteful ball, and apparently ready to spring upon the dog.

A well-aimed stone crushed the thing into a shapeless mass, and relieved Pugg of a far greater danger than he in his instinct ever learned.

Once more on their journey, the three riding in In-

dian file—Jose ahead, Martin next, and Smith in the rear with the pack-horses.

“I wonder whether Valequero will be surprised to see us?” remarked Martin, as he lowered his head to avoid an overhanging limb.

“He looks to me like a man who never gets surprised at anything. If he does, he never lets one know it.”

“He is a strange man, scarcely speaking half day. ‘Ow different from his magnificent daughter.”

“Suppose we stay with him a week or so, just to see if we can’t get him to talk. I flatter myself I’m as good as anybody to ask questions.”

“No use,” returned Martin, who had determined in his own mind to leave this part of the country as soon as possible.

At this point they all came in view of the inn. Both Englishman and American looked anxiously forward in the hope that Nina might be discovered flitting to and fro.

But nothing of her was seen; and both experienced a vague alarm at the unwonted stillness that reigned about the house.

They then rode up to the porch and dismounted; but still there was no appearance of Valequero or his servant.

“What can this mean?” asked Martin, as he stepped upon the porch, and gave a thundering knock at the door.

The knock was repeated several times, and our three friends were looking in each other’s faces with questioning dismay, when Valequero himself made his appearance from the edge of the wood, wringing his hands in great misery.

"O, Americanos! Americanos!" exclaimed he, "Pedro and his men came back last night, and carried away my Nina! Nina! Nina! I shall die! I shall die!"

"Where in blazes did they go?" demanded Ñ Smith, in great excitement. "Now let 'em look out for Yankee thunder."

CHAPTER XI

THE RESCUERS.

After awhile Martin began to get excited also. It was not often that his emotions got the better of his judgment, but there was an excuse on the present occasion.

"This is outrageous, 'orrible, infamous, hextraordinary. The villains hought to be 'ung!"

When excited he was sure to give the regular John Bull accent on his words.

"By gracious! somebody hold me!" exclaimed Peleg Smith, springing off his horse, and trotting around the animal as if he were running barefooted on a hot stove. "Hold me I say, or I'll do something desprit. To think that that infarnal Pedro should lay violent hands on sweet Nina—oh, ooooo!"

During this ebullition of just indignation, Jose had taken Vaquero aside, and obtained the particulars from him. The latter could talk very indifferent English, and he therefore used the Spanish. As we expect our readers generally to prefer the English language it is our purpose that this story shall be recorded in English only.

"Last night," said Vaquero, forcing down his emotion, "Pedro and his two men returned, inquiring for these two Americans. Pedro was resolved to kill

that long, slim man that you call Smith; but he didn't seem to care much about the fat man. They had been drinking, and were very angry about something. They took lodging last night, and went to bed very early. Nina and I were up quite late, as we expected other guests. But they did not come, and we went to our room a little before midnight. I hadn't been asleep long when I heard a scream. For some time I could not think what it meant, but the next minute recognized the voice of Nina. I sprang from my couch, threw on my clothes, and catching up my knife dashed to her room. But she was not there, and the next minute I heard her voice out upon the porch. I ran down, and when I reached the porch I caught sight of Pedro and the two men galloping away on their horses. Poor Nina! I saw the flutter of her dress, and her outstretched arms as she beheld me. Poor Nina! I shall die!"

This account, in substance as we have given it, was detailed to Smith and Martin. These worthies by this time had recovered from their excitement, and both were cool and collected. When Jose had finished, Smith began through him to question Valequero.

"Who is this Pedro? Tell Valequero we must know all that we can learn about him, for we intend to rescue Nina."

The words were repeated to the innkeeper, whose face brightened, and he hastened to reply:

"Pedro and his three men are robbers, who rob and kill travelers."

"Where do they stay?"

"Some ten miles away, in the deepest part of the woods, they have a house."

"Good! Nothing can be better! We know just where to find them. There are but three of them, you say?"

"That is all. They have great wealth."

"Which is also good. How long have they been in their profession?"

"For ten years or more. They have slain many persons."

"Just so, by gracious! It's our moral duty to squash them, then, and we'll do it—won't we Martin?"

"By heavens, but we will!" exclaimed the irate John Bull, growing very red in the face. "It is the most outrageous piece of villainy since—since—since the Hamerican Colonies rebelled"—

"What's that?" demanded Smith, turning upon the excited Englishman. "What's that?"

"Hi say it is the most outrageous piece of villainy since the Hamerican Colonies rebelled—thereby meaning the Confederate States, as I believe you talk of making colonies of them."

"Ah!" assented Smith, who did not know whether to be satisfied with this explanation or not. It looked rather dubious to him, but under the circumstances, he chose to let it go.

"You say Pedro and his men are ten miles distant—that is, his retreat is," said the Yankee turning to the task before him. "It's now well on toward sundown, and, as Don Valequero seems to know the spot, we can put a good deal of the distance behind us between now and pitch darkness."

"Hof course; don't think of hesitating a moment more than is necessary," exclaimed Martin, who seemed to lose all command of himself when the subject was broached. "O, the villains! to carry off my darling

Nina! She must be thinking of me this very moment, and wondering where I can keep myself!"

Smith looked upon his companion as upon the point of losing his senses. What did he mean by talking in that manner? Nina thinking of him! Much rather of Peleg Smith.

At length, all that Valequero knew regarding Pedro and his companions, was drawn out from him under the skilful manipulation of Smith. In fact, there was little more to be told. They were desperate men, who had an extended reputation as robbers and assassins. They frequently remained over night at Valequero's inn, although what their object was in doing so it was hard to divine, unless it was to "mark" their victims. Whether the abduction was for the purpose of revenging themselves upon Valequero for entertaining the impudent American, or whether they really wished Nina, was a matter which none of the party could decide for themselves.

Smith finally drew Martin aside.

"This is a mighty desprit thing for us to undertake, but I'd never dare face Jerusha Ann, and the folks at home, if I left Nina in their infarnal hands. Howsumever, we must go into it coolly. Now, in the first place, we must leave Jose here at the inn."

"Why so?" asked Martin, in considerable surprise.

"We must leave some one behind to take care of the two pack-horses and our baggage."

"We can 'ide our baggage, and let the hanimals take care of themselves."

"Yes, but we don't need Jose. I wouldn't take Valequero, if it wasn't to show us the way. If we two can't smash them three dogs, they ought to smash us. Three will be plenty, for we've got to outwit them."

If Peleg Smith had spoken his mind, he would have preferred that Martin should have remained behind also. He would much rather undertake the rescue alone; but he did not propose it.

“We will go without any baggage; a day or two’s provisions, and fully armed. We will get as near as possible to the den to-night, and then wait till daylight afore we do anything more.”

It required but a few moments to arrange the preliminaries. Valequero all too willingly furnished the food, Jose took the pack-horses to the stable, and prepared to make himself comfortable in his absence; and the three eager men left the inn, and took the path that was fated to lead them into such wild and varied adventure.

CHAPTER XII.

NINA.

It will be remembered that the night of Nina's abduction was a warm one, even for the tropical regions. After kissing her father good night, as was her custom, she went to her room and seated herself upon a sort of lounge by the window, where she sat gazing out upon the night, and meditating upon her past and future life. She wondered where the two pleasant Americans were who had spent the previous evening at her house. She recalled each, but there was no feeling of love for either—such an emotion had never entered her thoughts. In a pleasant reverie she finally fell asleep.

The creaking of her door awakened her. Opening her eyes in a startled manner, she descried a form just entering the room, and stealthily approaching her.

"Why, Pedro, what does this mean?"

"—sh!" he admonished, "not a word, or I'll kill you!"

Notwithstanding this injunction, Nina screamed at the top of her voice. Muttering maledictions, but not offering to harm her, Pedro dashed down stairs and out doors, where his two companions were in waiting, vainly trying on the way to close his hand over

Nina's mouth, who screamed and struggled, and fought like a young tigress. But she was as an infant in the hands of the powerful Pedro, and it caused him little trouble to mount his horse with her and gallop away.

It was fortunate for Pedro that Valequero did not obtain a chance to grapple with him. Lithe, active and sinewy, he would have been a very dangerous man when fighting for his only child.

On a rapid gallop the three men went up the road, and then struck off to the right into a sort of bridle-path. This was followed for perhaps a mile, when they turned into a more unfrequented one. On the edge of a pebbly brook, this was left, and after windings and deviations which it would be almost impossible and entirely useless to narrate, they came upon a denser piece of foliage, into which they boldly penetrated.

Five minutes later they dismounted from their horses, and the now silent and quiescent Nina was carried into the house to an upper room, where she was placed and locked in, without a word being uttered.

Nina had ceased screaming and struggling, because when beyond the sound of her father's voice she knew it could avail nothing. In spite of the terror and indignation she felt at this outrage, there was one thought that buoyed her up, and made her comparatively cheerful. Pedro and his men were very confident that no living being knew the way to their retreat, and yet, as we have hinted before, Valequero was thoroughly conversant with it. And Nina knew this, her father having one day, in a spasm of volubility, communicated it to her. He would leave no

means untried to rescue her, and with a knowledge of their retreat and their strength, he could not fail of success.

Still Nina was not free from alarm and apprehension. What Pedro's designs were against her it was impossible to tell. But he was one of the worst of men, and there could be nothing too base or brutish for him to perpetrate.

The moonlight enabled Nina to examine her room. She found no bed, but there were several elegant lounges and chairs, and the furniture was of an elegant and costly pattern. How it had ever been transported to this lonely spot in the depth of the woods, it was impossible to say.

Just as day was breaking, Nina fell into a troubled sleep—a sleep disturbed by all manner of frightful dreams. From these she was aroused by a kiss upon her cheek, and looking up she saw the hateful form of Pedro standing beside her.

“Go away!” she exclaimed, striking him violently in the face. “Go away! I hate the sight of you.”

“Why hate the sight of me?” he asked, in his musical voice, smiling withal in the most bland manner.

“Do you ask me that?” the little fury demanded, in impotent rage, as she stamped her foot. “Do you ask me that?—you who have taken me away from my father—my dear father, who has always been a friend to you?”

“Maybe I'll take you home—*some time*.”

“Maybe you *will* sooner than you expect!” said Nina, having really no reason for this covert threat, but

wishing to obtain some slight revenge by giving him a tinge of alarm.

"What means my fair one by that?"

"Never mind; you will learn in good time."

"Can I not learn now?"

"No."

"I feel very bad," said Pedro, in mock fear. "I shall weep away my eyes unless I am told."

"Weep then; I only hope you may."

"My sweet"—

Nina turned upon him, her black eyes seeming to flash fire. The fellow only smiled. The girl saw by his looks and manner that he was ridiculing her, and that he had not the shadow of a fear. She concluded in her own mind that it was best that Pedro should believe that her father knew nothing of this place of retreat. She therefore said:

"If my dear father only knew where to find me, you would suffer for this!"

"I make no doubt we should—that is, if he were able to make us suffer. But Don Valequero never heard of Pedro's Retreat, I fancy; nor any one else for that matter."

"If these two dear, sweet Americans could only meet you, you would never carry off any more persons who never harmed you or yours."

The fellow ground his teeth in rage. At that moment he would have yielded up Nina for the sake of wreaking his fury upon these hated foreigners. He muttered several oaths too terrible to transfer to paper, and added:

"I only hope I may meet them—that is, that slim man. I do not like the other, but I would not harm

him, as he treated me well. But the other!—I pray Holy Maria I may meet him!”

“And so I, indeed!”

“Say no more!” commanded Pedro, in a harsh tone.

Nina, enraged as she was, thought it best not to anger him further. She therefore turned her back upon him, and resolutely refused to say another word, although he asked several questions. Finally, he left her, having first set down an excellent breakfast of fruit, which for an hour or two she left untasted.

Nina was somewhat of a philosopher, however, and when she really felt hungry, she partook of the food. Then seating herself at her high-barred window, she looked out in the forest to watch for the coming of some one to save her, for never once in her mind did she doubt that a rescuer would come.

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE THRESHOLD.

Don Valequero having taken upon himself the duties of guide, rode at the head of the little band of rescuers, Smith following next, and Martin bringing up the rear. They kept close together, for all were anxious and impatient.

Straight up the road, in the direction that Pedro and his men had first taken, the three rode at a spanking gallop. When they turned off to the right, the moon had just made its appearance, but neither the Yankee or Englishman would have discerned the path into which they turned had it been broad day-

light, so covered and concealed was it by the exuberant and skilfully-arranged shrubbery.

Along this path, so dark that not one of the three literally saw more than an inch before his face, except when at long intervals the moon managed to pierce the matted branches overhead, a mile or so, and they made another sharp bend, then another, and finally reached the pebbly stream, which they crossed at a point where their horses' footprints would not be likely to attract the notice of those for whom they were searching.

All this time Smith and Martin were wondering to themselves how it was that Valequero knew this path so thoroughly. How was it that he never hesitated for a moment which way to turn? Even with his own shrewdness he would have been compelled to travel this route several times before he could remember it; how, then, was it that their guide followed it with such facility in the darkness, which in some places was impenetrable?

The natural answer at first was that Valequero was in league with these assassins and robbers, and that consequently he had traveled the same route many times. But the peculiar circumstances of the case made this theory absurd, for if Valequero was connected with Pedro by any nefarious doings, the former would never have allowed him to become an enemy, and thus incited him to reveal the secret of their retreat to their open enemies.

Furthermore, Valequero had remarked in the course of their conversation before starting, that he alone knew of Pedro's retreat, and that neither the latter nor any of his companions suspected his knowledge. He most certainly would never have revealed it had

he not been given every incentive to do so. Even had Smith and Martin both been certain of a guilty connection between their guide and the villains, neither of them would have hesitated. The innocent Nina was in danger, and that was all-sufficient.

It was near midnight that Valequero, who, for the last half hour, had been riding with extreme caution, quietly halted, and turning in his saddle, said, as well as he could speak in English.

“Git off now!”

All three dismounted, and securing their animals, began making their way stealthily forward, until they reached a sort of opening, into which a few spears of moonlight penetrated, serving to give the whole a dim, uncertain light, which barely revealed the salient points in the scene.

“Dere place!” said Valequero, pointing forward.

Our two friends experienced strange emotions as they gazed at the dim, uncertain mass of shrubbery, in which nothing resembling a house could be distinguished. Both were excited, as they realized fully the position in which they stood.

Should the three villains within become aware of the proximity of the three persons without, it would be almost impossible to secure the prize for which they were searching. Understanding all the labyrinthian passages and hidden retreats, they could escape with their lovely prize, or remain within their castle and laugh to scorn all attempts to dislodge them.

“We’ve got to outwit ’em!” said Smith, giving expression to his thoughts. “That’s plain, if anything can be plain in this darkness.”

“Hi think we can do so,” said Martin, doubtingly.

"I know it, by gracious. We've got the advantage, as they don't s'pect we're anywhere in the neighborhood. Wal, I swaow! if here ain't Pugg!" exclaimed Smith, as the little dog whisked between his legs. "We must keep him shady," he added, as he stooped down and raised him from the ground.

"Do you propose to do anything to-night, Peleg?" asked Martin, after a moment's pause.

Smith was now the leader of the party. The two unconsciously recognized him as such the moment they arrived upon the scene of action. Valequero stood silent and listening, ready, waiting and anxious to obey the word of command.

"No; we can't do anything to-night. We must wait till daylight."

"And what then?"

"I s'pose there's a winder to the concern' ain't there?" asked Smith, turning to Valequero.

"Yes—two, three."

"If there's a room with a winder, you'll find Nina there. They'll put her up stairs, and she'll sit by the winder and watch all day."

"She then will see us."

"That's the idee. We must manage to let her know we're about—git her to work inside and we outside, and then we'll jerk 'em."

"The window must be barred."

"No doubt of that, or they wouldn't trust her by it."

"'Ow then can we release her?"

"'Tain't likely they'd use *iron* bars."

"Wooden ones, eh?" exclaimed Martin, joyously.

"That's the idee again; don't you think we can manage it if we find such to be the case?"

"Ho, yes! ho, yes! Hi only wish it was daylight

this minute; but s'posen she hain't got a knife, Peleg? S'posen she hain't, Peleg."

"We've got several, I reckon. If she had one, 'tain't likely she could do much good with it, unless it might be to stick that Pedro, and I'm afraid that little gal hain't got the heart to do that, for all he has used her bad enough to make him deserve it."

"Ho, my darling Nina!" exclaimed Martin, tragically, "'ow I long to 'elp thee, and thee must be longing to fly to my arms. Ho, Nina, my own dar"---

"See here," interrupted Smith, "Martin, what do you mean by talking in that style. Are you and her engaged? If not, why do you call her *your* darling Nina?"

"Ho, my 'eavens!" replied the Englishman in horror, "Hi meant nothing like that; Hi am only anxious to release her."

"All right; but I wouldn't talk that way before her father, and, ahem! *me!*"

"What?"

"It's getting late, or, rather, early. Valequero, we must take our horses further away, where they won't be heard if they make a noise."

The three moved off, and under the guidance of Valequero, led their animals deeper into the wood, where, securing them, Smith and Martin wrapped themselves up, and laid down to receive a little slumber before daybreak. No sleep visited their eyelids, however, upon that night.

CHAPTER XIV.

While Martin and Smith lay upon the ground, and pretended to slumber, Valequero passed backward and forward, his anxiety too great to allow him to remain quiescent. At the first approach of dawn, which came very soon in that tropical latitude, he aroused his friends, and informed them the moment for action had come.

Neither hesitated a moment, but springing up set out for the retreat under the guidance of Valequero, whose impatient stride kept Martin upon a semi-trot that caused him to pant and perspire greatly. Finally, their gait slackened, and pausing, and parting the bushes in front of him, the inn-keeper signified that the retreat was before them.

For the first time our two friends gained a fair view of this noted place. It was a small, powerfully-built building of logs, two stories in height, and apparently divided into several compartments. The whole structure was so wrapped in a netting of rank vines and undergrowth, which climbed to its very peak, and then went on up in air, that a casual observer would have taken it for a natural mound of earth, covered in this manner with vegetation. In this climate, where trees grow in a night, such instances of exuberant vegetation are very common.

It was only after a minute examination that a window was discovered. Strong, heavy bars could be seen crossing this, but there was no evidence of any person being in the room. During the half-hour that

our friends stood and gazed, there was no manifestation of life upon the outside.

"We must find out how many winders there be?" said Smith, "so that we can locate the gal. Do you know the winders? Have you ever been in the house?" he asked, turning upon Valequero.

"No," returned the latter.

"You stay here, then, while I take a look."

With this Smith took his departure, and commenced a stealthy reconnoissance of the building. Their first view had been from the rear, and he now made his way around to the front. As he moved along he kept his eye fixed upon the rude structure.

When directly in front of it, the door was opened, and Pedro himself came forth. He stood and yawned, as if to inhale the fresh morning air. Smith raised his gun and brought the fellow directly under range. It was prudence only restrained him from firing. The alarm that his death would cause would put the other two villains on their guard, and prove fatal to Nina.

"No, my fine fellow, I'll wait a little longer!" muttered Smith, as he lowered his piece. "I ain't done with you yet, and it's likely we'll meet afore many days go over our heads. Howsumever—blastation!"

The last exclamation was caused by Smith's little dog Pugg, or rather the dog of Martin's, whisking, by him, and starting toward the yawning form of Pedro. Not until this moment was the Yankee aware that the dog had followed him. He started up, and was about to spring forward and catch him, when he saw that he had gone so far, that it was impossible to overtake him without exposing himself, a risk which could not be thought of for a moment.

The little plague went hopping forward right toward the man, and Smith was already gnashing his teeth in impotent chagrin, when Pedro, without observing the dog, turned round, went in and shut the door behind. Pugg raised his head, looked around in perplexity, and gave a short yelp. Smith succeeded finally, by whistling very cautiously, in bringing him back.

"Confound you!" he muttered, as he grappled him by the back, and fastened the chain in his pocket to his neck; "if you get away from me again it will be a few days after this."

Passing on with the little quadruped in tow, Smith finally discerned another window. These two were all he could make out, and completing the circuit of the building, he returned to his impatient companions. He saw at once by their manner that something important had occurred during his absence. Martin was all aglow, his face beaming like the full moon. And just as soon as he dare risk it, he said:

"We've seen 'er! We've seen 'er! Thank the Lord! My hown blessed, darling, sweet Nina!"

"Where? when?"

"Hat the winder. I know'd she was hexpecting me. Hi could tell her by the way she grinned—smiled."

The gleeful Englishman rubbed his hands as if with "invisible soap," and seemed fairly beside himself, Smith rather envying his ecstasy.

"Give me the particulars—how it was you came to see her?" said he, without evincing any excitement.

"Why you see, Hi was watching the window,

'cause Ili *knowed* she was there! Ili *felt* it, when I seen her blessed face appear. Ili jumped right up and waved my 'and, and she waved her 'andkerchief in reply, and that's what we've been doing ever since. Bless her sweet soul, there she is now "

The Englishman was right. The face of Nina Valquero was plainly distinguishable at the window. Smith advanced from the shrubbery to where he was sure she could see him, and made a signal to which she instantly replied. He then withdrew again to his companions.

"She'll know we can't do anything till night, and will possess her soul in patience. So all we've got to do is to do nothing."

After waiting an hour, Martin called Smith aside.

"See 'ere, my dear friend, Ili want to ask you a favor, that you must grant. Will you promise now?"

"Certainly," replied Smith, greatly amused at the serious manner of his companion.

"Ili want you—Ili want you to let me rescue Nina to-night."

"You! How?"

"Ili 'ave a plan that cannot fail," he said, mysteriously.

"Don't you need my help?"

"None at all; that's the beauty hof it. Hall you 'ave to do is to wait here till I bring her to you."

"Are you sure that it will succeed? We cannot afford to run any risk."

"Sure as Ili am that Ili'm a native of Hold Hin-gland."

"I'm willing."

Martin thanked him, and the three impatiently waited for night. When it came, he bid them good-

by, and cautiously approached the retreat. Through the day he had busied himself with making a sort of ladder, which he carried with him. The upper end of this just reached to Nina's window. Placing it against the house, he commenced ascending it.

This was a work of extreme labor, and Martin nearly gave out. He panted, and frequently rested. But finally his head appeared at the window-sill. To his surprise, he saw that the bars were gone. Undoubtedly the girl had made good use of her time, and removed them. The room was dark, but he discerned a figure within. Catching by his hands, Martin, with great difficulty pulled himself forward.

"Bless your hown dear, sweet soul!" he exclaimed, joyously, as he commenced crawling in. "You 'ave been waiting for me, my hown stricken dear, sweet, charming, darling Nina."

And the next moment the lover-like Englishman was received in the arms of Pedro, the robber!

CHAPTER XV.

THE WAY IT HAPPENED.

It was not without considerable misgiving, that Peleg Smith consented to the scheme of John Martin's. He asked several times for an explanation of its character, but the sturdy Englishman persistently refused, affirming that he was sure of its success; that it was impossible to fail. His plan simply was to ascend to the window by the help of his rudely-constructed ladder, there to hand Nina a knife, and then to use one himself. In fact, as this was about all the plan that could be adopted under the circumstances, it may be said to have been a good one,

but not carrying with it the absolute certainty of success that the enthusiastic Englishman had claimed for it.

The ladder of which we have spoken consisted of a tough sapling of many limbs. These had been lopped off within a few inches of the body, thus leaving numerous prong-like projections, up which it was easy for an ordinary man to make his way.

It may be said that Peleg Smith never once felt satisfied with remaining idle, and allowing his friend to attempt the rescue alone and unarmed. He had been associated with him long enough to comprehend him. Enthusiastic, good-natured, and kind-hearted to a fault, the chances were that he would spoil all by his blundering precipitancy, and thus defeat or set back their plans. Smith would not admit that they could be defeated, for he was resolved never to leave that neighborhood without placing Nina in the hands of her father, and ridding the country forever of such incarnate villains as Pedro and his companions.

Both the Yankee and Valequero witnessed the departure of Martin with considerable anxiety. The night was so dark that, after passing half the intervening distance, he was hid from view, and the two, therefore, had nothing to do but to listen and wait.

It was not long before the blowing of the Englishman was heard as he laboriously made his way up the ladder. Then his ardent, lover-like words, and then all was still.

At this point the apprehension of Smith became intense. The critical moment had come. Nina was to be saved through Martin's efforts; it could not be long before she was among them. Anxiously he strained his eyes through the darkness, hoping to discern the two approaching; but he saw nothing.

The prolonged stillness began to fill Smith with alarm, and he determined to approach the building to see whether he could ascertain. Informing Valequero of his intention as best he could under the circumstances, he left his dog in his charge, and stole stealthily forward.

The uncertainty regarding Martin made the New En-

glander extremely cautious in his movements. If the plan miscarried, he knew there would be some one watching at the window, and a rifle-ball from within could put a summary stop to all further proceeding.

At length he gained a view of the window, and saw that it was clear of all bars, while the ladder was leaning at its base. At first Smith thought perhaps Martin was lingering within, to make love to his fair charge before descending with her; but this was hardly probable, as she must be sensible of the extreme danger attending it. No; finally he was compelled to believe that something was wrong.

Nina Valequero, upon rising on the second day of her captivity, after repeating her prayers, went to her window, as usual, to look forth for her rescuers, confident that they would appear this day.

She had been there but a few moments, when her eye became centered upon a point in the wall where she fancied she detected a movement of something. Whether it was made by some animal or serpent, or by some person, it was impossible for a time to tell.

Her vision was soon greeted by the round, rubicund face of Martin, who advanced incautiously forward, and waved his hand. Nina instantly returned the signal, and thus communication was established between the two parties.

The poor girl was delighted beyond measure, when her father made himself visible. Her rescuers were at hand, and the hour of deliverance was nigh. She could hardly restrain her joy, and it was with considerable difficulty that she restrained herself from singing one of her gayest of songs.

Nina knew that her friends would attempt nothing before nightfall. Even then the risk would be terrible, for Pedro visited her room very frequently to make himself sure she was planning no escape. Her buoyancy of spirits

was so great that she was fearful the suspicious captor would scent danger at once.

Pedro brought her breakfast and dinner, and remained a half hour or so in her room during the afternoon, conversing with her. Nina could not refrain from talking, so overjoyed was she at the prospect before her; and the villainous Pedro began to entertain a powerful passion for her. He believed he could win her heart by applying himself assiduously, and he regretted more than once that he had taken her from her father's house. It might make the gulf impassable between them.

After his departure, Nina exchanged signals with her friends several times. She had discovered the presence of Smith, and she now entertained no doubt that the hours of her captivity were drawing rapidly to a close.

When it had become fairly dark, and her friends were invisible, and Nina was waiting every moment for some sign of their approach, she was alarmed by the sudden entrance of her terror, Pedro.

"What brings you here?" she demanded, impatiently.

"Your charming society."

"I would prefer to be alone."

"And I would not."

Nina turned her back upon him, but he resolutely refused to move. He spoke again:

"This apartment is not good enough for my charming Nina. I shall give you another."

"I am satisfied with this," she returned, endeavoring to conceal the alarm she felt.

"I must give you a better one," he pursued. "I have a room whose window faces the front, which shall be sacred to you. There no one shall ever be allowed to disturb you."

"Pedro," said Nina, turning earnestly upon him, "if you think *anything* of me, you will let me remain here. I ask it as an especial favor."

"Can't think of it," he replied, with a significant emphasis. "You must go with me."

Thereupon he took her by the arm, and sullen and des-

pairing, she was led into the adjoining apartment. A curious key was handed her, and she was told to fasten herself within, for no one would attempt to disturb her.

Whether Pedro had suspected danger or not, can never be known. The probabilities are that his suspicious nature was aroused; for proceeding immediately to the room which he had just left, he removed the bars, and stood waiting in the darkness. He had not long to wait, as we have seen, before the ardent John Martin came directly into his arms.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE LION'S DEN.

It may be safely said that John Martin's emotions were "indescribable," when instead of grasping the charming form of Nina Valequero, his arms closed around the burly form of Pedro, who, muttering a terrible malediction in Spanish, he changed to English:

"Ah, I have you! You come steal Nina, eh?"

"This is hextraordinary!" the Englishman found breath to exclaim. "Hi didn't hexpect it."

"Don't think you did. What you come for?"

"For Nina—to save her!"

"Where be rest?"

This question gave Martin one of the most brilliant ideas that ever entered his cranium. He knew at once that Pedro could not be really certain that Valequero and Smith were waiting upon the outside, although the probabilities were strong in favor of such being the case. Believing deceit to be justifiable under the circumstances, he determined to make the villain think he was entirely alone.

"Where be who?"

"That long mau—where be he?"

It was evident from this question that he did not suspect Valequero to be anywhere in the neighborhood.

"Hi don't know; Hi left him some time ago. We're hon our way hout of the country."

"How came you here?"

"Hi was going along, when Hi 'appened to see the face of Nina hat the window. Hi s'pose this is her country seat."

The room was so dark that Martin could not distinguish the face of Nina's captor. He detected a slight, scornful laugh, and he fancied the man believed him.

"Why didn't come in door?"

"Bless you! Hi didn't see any to come in. Nina appeared to want me to come this way, so Hi tried it. Like to used me up, too."

"Think did; won't try it again?"

"No; Hi think Hi've done my duty. Where is Don Valequero? Hi should like to see him."

"At his inn, s'pose."

"'Ow is it Nina is 'ere, then?"

"She come out spend a few days with me."

"Hoh, hoh! just so."

"Can't you stay night?"

"No; Hi think Hi'll go on, or my friend Smith will not know wnat has become of me."

All this time the two stood conversing in a darkness which revealed each other's forms in a very indistinct manner. Both stood up, Martin not daring to move for fear of tumbling over some piece of furniture.

The Englishman had a loaded revolver which he could place his hand upon at an instant's warning. He could have shot down the man before him, had he chosen to do so; but he did not. He was averse to shedding blood. When there was no other method of escape, it was time enough to do so.

Besides all this, Martin had a lingering belief that the man would not injure him. Their first meeting at Valequero's inn had been pleasant, without any ill words, and he could not feel assured he would seek his life. Still the genial-natured man was prudent enough to be on the constant alert.

"We go down stairs—stay awhile."

"With pleasure; halthough Hi can't stay long."

Pedro lighted a sort of lamp, which illuminated the room. Martin was too well-bred to manifest any rude surprise in gazing about the room. He simply waited for his host to lead the way.

"Come down," said the latter, motioning to go.

Martin followed him without hesitation. He led him into a lower apartment, which was furnished in the most sumptuous manner. Here motioning him to a seat, he produced a case of cigarettes, and offered him one. Martin accepted it with thanks, and, as he had not smoked for a considerable time, he really enjoyed the weed.

He had been seated but a few moments when he heard a noise in an adjoining apartment, and immediately the two other men entered. They saluted the Englishman, as they would have made obeisance to a distinguished guest, and accepting a cigarette from their leader, sat down, and became members of the company.

The position of Martin by this time had become a peculiar one. Sitting and smoking apparently on the best of terms; chatting and smiling as though all were the dearest of friends, and yet not knowing but what each of the three men were his deadliest enemies, and that they were only awaiting a signal from their leader to riddle him with bullets, or gash him to pieces with knives! Strange, indeed, was his situation, and enough to make him feel uneasy, at least.

Neither of the two who had last entered offered a word. They simply smoked, and occasionally nodded their heads, by way of assent to something that had been said.

"How far away, friend—long man?"

"Don't know; Hi don't know what he'll think of my staying haway so long."

"Maybe he come."

"'Ardly likely," returned Martin, in a matter-of-fact tone. "He may wait for me."

"Wish he come," said Pedro, with a baleful glitter of his evil eyes.

"So do I," said Martin, with an eager shimmer of his great honest orbs. "Shall Ii go bring 'im?"

"No, never mind," replied Pedro, in a significant manner. "Maybe he come any way. You go out of country?"

"Yes, Ii think Ii'll go back to Hold Hengland. Ii feel that that's my 'ome."

"England great country."

"Glorious! 'Ave you heyer been there?"

"No."

"You must make it a visit. When you come, hinqire for me. There's my card."

Martin arose and handed Pedro his card. The latter received it very politely, and placed it carefully on a small stand beside him.

"Glad of your company," resumed the latter, "but like to go—me willing."

"Thank you. Ii should be pleased to take another cigar with you, but Ii really 'aven't the time," said Martin, rising as if to go.

The man handed him the cigar-case, and he took one and lighted it. Pedro then opened the door, and extended his hand.

"Adieu."

"Good-by," said Martin, shaking it cordially, and bowing very politely to the rest, he passed out into the open air, smoking very vigorously, and stepping very briskly, from a feeling somewhat similar to that of a man who is in the momentary expectation of a shot in the rear.

Pedro stood a moment, and then turned to re-enter his house, when he started and uttered an exclamation of fury. He had good occasion for it.

"What *can* keep him?" muttered Smith, as crouching upon the ground, he gazed upward at the window where

John Martin had disappeared. "It can't be that he's making love to Nina right over the head of Pedro and his men!"

Creeping still closer, the New Englander endeavored to penetrate the darkness of the room. Finally, he discovered that the bars of the window were gone.

"I'm sure that was heavily barred!" he soliloquized, "and now every bar is gone. What, then, can keep them? ah!"

He detected the hum of voices, and his heart instantly rose in fear. He made his way up to the very side of the house and listened. He could hear the deep bass of Martin, and a soft, silvery voice, which he was uncertain whether it belonged to Pedro or to Nina. He could not believe the latter, for it would have shown a recklessness or foolishness in both that was incomprehensible.

Smith could not distinguish words, and he made his way round to the front of the house. Here, close by the door, he knelt down and listened. He held his revolver in his hand, ready for any emergency. No sound was heard, and retreating a step or two, he looked up at the window, which was directly over the door.

While gazing upward a figure came to the window, and the next instant he discerned a face looking down upon him.

"O, Mr. Smith, is that you?" came in a terrified whisper.

"My gracious! is that you, Nina? I thought you was at the other window."

"He put me in here a little while ago."

"Do you want to get out?"

"Oh, help me! help me!" she implored. "It will soon be too late."

"Not while I live!" he gallantly returned. "Is your window barred?"

"Yes; but the bars are not so heavy as the other. Oh, Mr. Smith, can you not assist me?"

"I'll see; wait there a moment."

Stealing back to the rear of the house, Smith gently re-

moved Martin's ladder. As he did so he ran far more risk than he imagined. Pedro and the Englishman at that moment were conversing with each other, within a few feet of the window. He, however, was so cautious in the movement that no sound was made.

Coming around to the front, Smith placed the ladder against the house, and in a moment was at the window. Producing his huge, keen jack-knife, he instantly set to work.

In a few moments the end of one bar was severed. Taking hold of the free end, one powerful wrench brought it from its fastening, and handing it to Nina, she laid it softly on the floor. A few moments more sufficed for the displacement of the second, when the aperture was almost large enough for Nina to pass through. Still, to make the matter certain, Smith instantly went to work upon the third.

When this was nearly cut, the noise of footsteps was heard, and he crouched down below the window, so that his head could not be discovered. Drawing his revolver, he waited and listened, determined to shoot whoever entered the room, and hurry off with Nina. The footsteps, however, were those of Pedro and Martin on their way to the lower floor.

As they died out, Smith set to work with the utmost vigor, and in a few moments the third and last bar necessary was cut. The way was now clear, and with a beating heart the imprisoned bird trusted herself to the hands of her liberator.

Drawing her carefully through the opening, Smith commenced descending the rude ladder, with her in his arms. This was very difficult and dangerous. He had but one arm to steady himself with, and a misstep would have precipitated both to the ground. True, the distance was not great, and neither could have suffered injury. But the noise would have brought the three villains forth, and they were rather too large a force for Smith to be anxious to encounter under the circumstances.

The New Englander was wiry and powerful, and he

finally reached the ground in safety. Leaving the ladder leaning against the house on purpose to inform Pedro of the manner in which his prisoner had escaped, Smith set his charge upon the ground, and the two male all haste to where Valequero was impatiently awaiting them.

The meeting between the father and daughter was affecting. Nina sprang into his arms, and clasped her own around his neck. The strong man bowed his head and sobbed like a child. While the interview was taking place, Peleg Smith stood by playing with his dog, and whistling "Yankee Doodle" very softly.

Waiting until Nina was released, he then turned to her and said:

"Nina, I'd like to talk to you a bit."

She wheeled around to signify that she was in readiness.

"You see we're clear of that infernal place, but Martin isn't. He's in there this very minute."

"Oh, yes, we must never leave our very *dear* friend there.

"Gosh hang it!" muttered Smith to himself.

He called her *dear*, and now she calls him the same. What can it mean? Then aloud—"Did you see him captured?"

"No; just before he came, Pedro took me out of the room, and placed me where you found me. He then went back himself."

"You haven't seen Martin to speak to him?"

"No; the poor, *dear* man."

"It must have been them two that I heard talking together. I thought at first it was *you* and him talking love."

The place was not dark enough to conceal Nina's look of utter amazement at this remark. Valequero also looked at him in a questioning manner. He replied lightly:

"I didn't mean anything—just some brilliant wit of mine. But do you know where Martin is?"

"We heard noises when you were at work at the window you know?"

"Yes; I remember very well."

"I think it was made by Pedro, and our *dear* friend going down to the lower room."

"Ah! just so! What could that mean?"

"I don't think Pedro intends to harm him. They will k together awhile and smoke, and then he will come "

"Did you see either of the other two scamps?"

"No; but I heard them moving about."

"They are then in the building."

"Yes; I am sure."

"Wal, I'm going to help Martin out. It wouldn't do to leave a friend in such a position; and, besides that, I can't afford to, as he pays the expense of this journey."

Hereupon Smith bade his friends a temporary farewell, and set out for the retreat. When nearly there, he caught sight of a bright point of light like a star. It seemed approaching, and he paused. A moment later and he saw it was the lighted end of a cigarette, and that the jovial John Martin held it between his teeth.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

Smith and John Martin met about a hundred yards from the retreat, and grasped hands. The dangers which they had mutually shared cemented them by the strongest ties of friendship.

"My gracious! how is it I meet you in this manner?" asked the New Englander, as the two turned around and walked slowly toward the wood, where Valequero and his daughter stood awaiting them.

"Hit is hextraordinary—and not hextraordinary, either, when you come to look at it. My plan—h'ahem—didn't—that is—didn't exactly succeed you see."

"Although you was so very sartin about it."

"'Uman calculations are fallible, you know. Instead of finding Nina in the room Ili found old Pedro, who took me down stairs, gave me a cigar, and then let me go."

Smith said nothing to let Martin know that he had rescued Nina, as he wished to surprise his companion. As they walked along, he said:

"And how about Nina Valequero?"

Martin drew a long breath:

"Too bad! too bad! Ili don't know what will become of her. Pedro has been halarmed, and he will be looking out now. Bless my heyes! if there ain't the blessed girl. What means this?"

The whole party were soon in the midst of an animated conversation, when the little dog, "Pugg," gave a bark of alarm. Turning quickly around, the startled ones saw, not twenty yards distant, Pedro and his companions, all mounted on their horses, and approaching.

"Into the woods, all of you!" exclaimed Smith, wheeling Valequero and Martin around, and shoving them away.

The inn-keeper caught up his daughter, and plunged at a rapid rate deeper into the forest, while Martin, with a most fortunate ignorance turned sharp to the left. He knew that he was no longer the guest of Pedro; that no mercy would be shown him, and he therefore proceeded as fast as his peculiar structure would admit.

Peleg Smith stood still until assured of the safety of his friends, when he started to attend to himself. At that moment the skillful hand of Pedro threw a lasso over his head, and straightened it instantly. Wheeling his horse around, he then dashed toward his own cabin at a terrific rate. His two companions continued the pursuit of the remaining fugitives.

The moment that the lasso settled over the head of Smith, he was in the act of raising his gun to defend himself. It thus happened that, instead of garroting him, as Pedro intended, the gun barrel interposed and saved him from a death by suffocation.

For one moment the New Englander was stunned and bewildered. He was dragged a yard or two over the

ground, when the loop in the lasso slipped off of its own accord, and he was left free.

The skillful Pedro perceived the mishap at once, and checked his animal. At this moment the two men were, perhaps, fifty yards apart. Turning around, the cold-blooded villain commenced retracing his steps with his horse, leaning forward, and out of his saddle to catch a glimpse of the hated foreigner.

Peleg Smith, upon being freed, lay still upon the ground. His whole body was smarting and aching with the violent usage he had received, and he was in no very amiable mood. The moment he descried the horse returning, he lay flat upon the ground, and drew back the hammer of his revolver.

The horse discovered the prostrate form of Smith before his master did, and the intelligent animal instantly stopped. Still failing to see his man, Pedro leaned forward, and finally discerned the dark form upon the ground. At that instant three barrels of the revolver in Smith's hand was discharged, and the notorious assassin and robber rolled lifeless to the ground, while his affrighted horse dashed snorting away. Smith deliberately arose to his feet.

The little dog Pugg, whisked up beside him, and he set out for the cabin which had been so fruitful in incidents to him. The door was open, and he unhesitatingly entered. There was a small, beautiful lamp still burning. Taking this up, Smith commenced his explorations.

In the present room there was nothing to attract special attention, and he passed into the other apartment that appeared to occupy the remainder of the ground-floor. There was nothing here to reward search, and he made his way up stairs. Before doing so, he placed Pugg near the door, and instructed him to give warning the instant any one approached.

The first rooms reached were the two that had been successively occupied by Nina. He ran over the apartments with a keen eye, but saw nothing unusual, except the rare and costly furniture. There was a small room next to

this whose door was locked. Two or three vigorous shoves sent it inwards, and Smith entered.

There seemed to be nothing except a large box, which entirely filled one end of the room. It required no little labor to open this but when the lid was raised, the man started back in utter amazement.

The box was stered with gold, diamonds, and all manner of precious gems! Their value must have been hundreds of thousands of dollars!

"Whew! that is big!" exclaimed Smith, as he commenced examining them; "it's no doubt they have been stolen. I'll confiscate a few."

"I can call myself rich," said he, musing. "I can go home, and Jerusha Ann need wait no longer. I think I've about all I can comfortably carry —sh!"

At this instant the faithful poodle gave a warning bark. Blowing out his lamp, Smith ran softly into the apartment where Nina was first confined, and looked out of the open window. All appeared clear; but while he was listening, he heard the two men carrying the body of their leader into the house. To his surprise, too, he learned from their exclamations that he was not dead.

The New Englander concluded it was now prudent for him to retire. Leaning out of the window as far as possible, he let himself drop to the ground, and then made all haste to the woods. On the way thither, owing to a hole in his pocket, he dropped about ten thousand dollars' worth of diamonds, without even knowing it. In fact, had it been daylight, his enemies might have traced him by these precious stones.

On reaching the wood, Smith was in the act of debating with himself what to do, when a heavy tread caught his ear, and looking around, he was delighted at perceiving the rubicund face of John Martin.

"Hi run about a 'undred yards!" said he, by way of explanation, "and then Hi give out, and lay down to die. But nobody come after me, and so Hi went to sleep; Hi just woke up, and thinking p'raps you might be proud 'ere, Hi come back to look."

In a few words, Smith related what had taken place in the last half hour. Both were filled with great concern regarding their friends. They had the consolation, however, of knowing they had escaped, as the villains were at that moment within their retreat.

Finally, both concluded to return to where their horses were tethered, and then proceed to Valequero's inn. Upon reaching the place, they found Valequero mounted with his daughter, and in the act of riding away. He stated that he had had a very narrow escape with Nina, the two men dashing their horses into the woods until stopped by its density, then they dismounted, and continued the search on foot. They came very close to where he and his daughter were concealed, but failed to discover them, and finally gave up the pursuit.

A half hour later, the party were making their way back again. When they reached Valequero's inn it was broad daylight, and Jose was patiently awaiting them. After partaking of a substantial meal, a long consultation was held. The result of this was the resolve upon the part of Valequero to leave the neighborhood at once. He had long contemplated sending his daughter to one of the South American cities to complete her education, and the opportunity was now afforded him. He had amassed great wealth, the major part of which was in a portable form. He made arrangements with Jose to conduct his inn during his absence, which he expected would be five years at least, while the probabilities were that he would never return.

The same day the four set out for the sea-coast. The particulars of their journey thereto need not be dwelt upon. They reached it in due time. Valequero did his best to make Martin and Smith accept a handsome sum of money as payment for their inestimable services, but neither would consent, as both were abundantly rich.

THE END.

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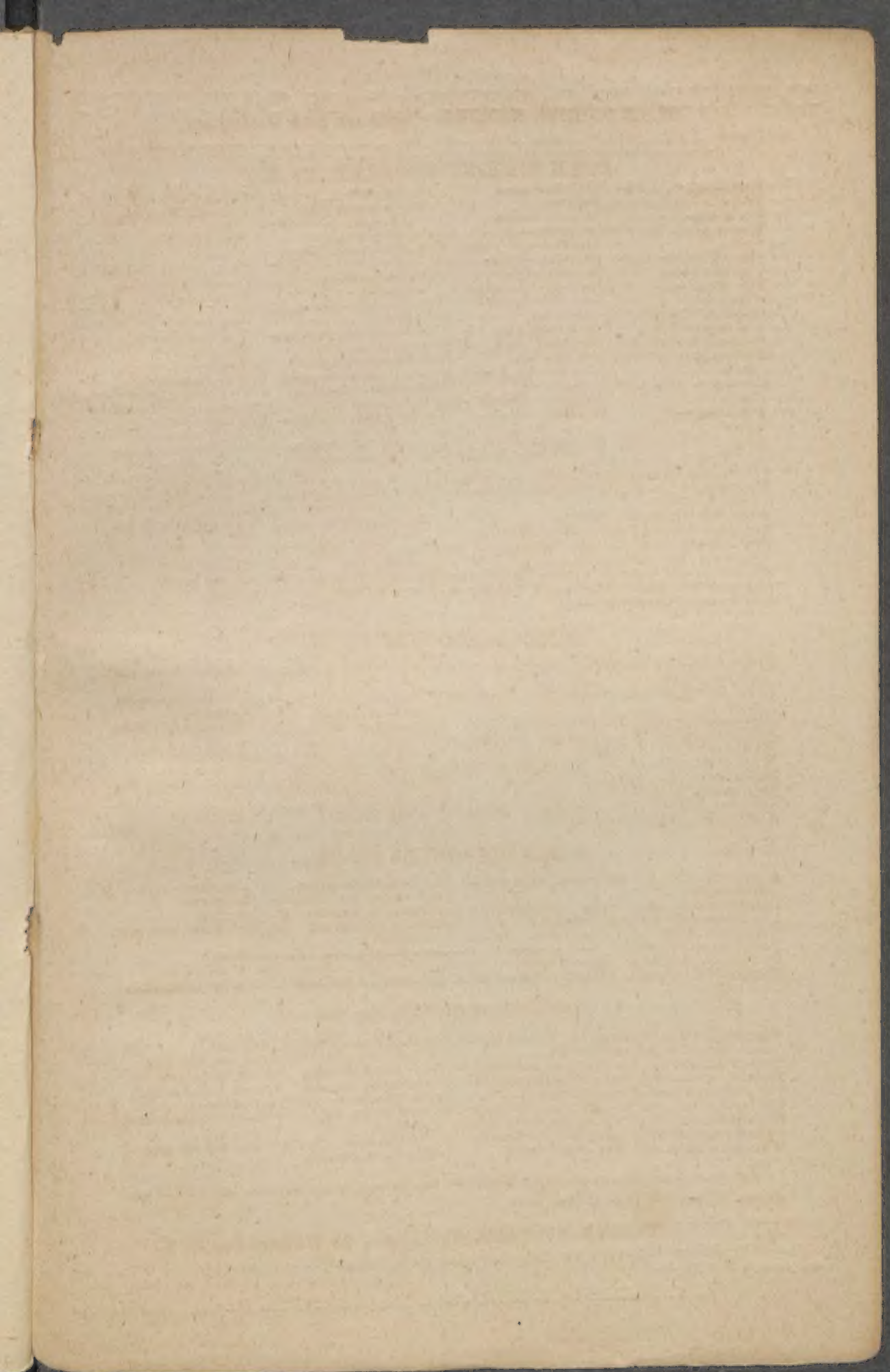
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